

CRITIQUES, CREDITS AND CREDIBILITY:
ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIO ART COURSES

Sebastien Fitch

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By: SEBASTIEN FITCH

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| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Dr. Philippe Caignon | Chair |
| Dr. Terry Barrett | External Examiner |
| Professor Leopold Plotek | External to Program |
| Dr. Richard Lachapelle | Examiner |
| Professor Eric Simon | Examiner |
| Dr. Lorrie Blair | Thesis Supervisor |

Approved by

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

Critiques, Credits and Credibility: Assessment in Higher Education Studio Art Courses
Sebastien Fitch, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2016

The purpose of this dissertation is to add to the understanding of the pedagogy of post-secondary studio art education – presently a mostly un-theorized teaching tradition – by examining how instructors go about the problematic exercise of assessing their students. Focussing on group critiques held during undergraduate studio classes, this research takes the form of an interpretive multiple case study involving a total of fifteen studio art instructors from six public North American post-secondary institutions.

This research is of pedagogical value for both current and future instructors in terms of the discussions it opens regarding assessment practices in studio instruction, as well as the variety of approaches to studio critiques that are described within. More importantly, however, what this dissertation demonstrates is that the state of art assessment is just as vague, confusing and generally chaotic as anecdotal evidence and general public perception would indicate. In particular, the studio critique is singled out as distinctly problematic, and this despite its signature pedagogical status according to both instructors as well as the field literature. The effectiveness of the critique is undermined by a number of assumptions, most importantly that of the efficacy of its place in the process of student assessment. The data discussed within these pages demonstrates that not only is the critique a singularly ineffective venue for assessment, but this very approach to the critique neglects the key objective of studio instruction – and instruction in general – namely *student learning*.

It is precisely from the point of view of student learning that this dissertation advances the notion of the MetaCritique; essentially, an approach to the critique that shifts the focus from assessment to that of self-reflective learning, and from the students' artwork to the student themselves. By doing so, learning objectives which are otherwise questionably attributed to the process of critiques as they are currently conducted are more concretely and effectively addressed, as well as being made explicit to students.

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Next, I would like to thank the participants of this study, who so generously gave of their time, classrooms, experiences and opinions; it is a testament to their professional dedication that they would add so freely to their already heavy workloads for the sake of furthering research into the field.

My thanks as well to the members of my examining committee, Dr. Richard Lachapelle, Professor Leopold Plotek and Professor Eric Simon, and my external examiner Dr. Terry Barrett, for agreeing to read and discuss my work with both open and critical minds.

I would also like to express my special and heartfelt gratitude to my wife-to-be, Kavita Batra. Without her support, patience and keen mind, many a fertile conversation about art and pedagogy would never have taken place, and this dissertation would have been all the poorer for it.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all those art instructors working in primary schools, high schools, universities and colleges everywhere, who believe that art is a subject worth teaching for no other reason than for its own sake.

“There is much to be done. It matters what [those] of good will want to do with their lives.”

- R. B. Kitaj

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Most self-directed research starts with a sense of curiosity; a subject of interest to the researcher or a nagging question that pre-existing sources of information have not managed to answer. This is most certainly the case of the present study. I began my undergraduate career at the University of Toronto over twenty years ago, majoring in Medieval Studies with a minor in Studio Art. I had always had a deep-rooted interest in all things related to art – its history, processes and ideologies – and was two thirds of the way into my degree when I finally realized that I was much more interested in my studio courses than I was in memorizing the construction dates of Gothic cathedrals. For that reason, I switched institutions in order to focus on what I considered to be my true calling.

During the course of my ensuing studio degree at the Ontario College of Art and Design¹, I gained much useful knowledge regarding matters of technique as well as the social aspects of the art world and art teaching. However, I also found some of my experiences within its walls troubling. Notably, several instructors I encountered during those four years seemed to step right out of a fictional satire of art school education. One instructor I had would show up at the beginning of a class, have us start working, and then simply leave without another word. At break time, he would return to inform us we had ten minutes break, and then disappear again until the end of class.

Another instructor routinely arrived up to half an hour late, only to then give advice that seemed often irrelevant, and occasionally surreal. To one student who was interested in observational figure painting, he suggested that they should paint “flying saucers shooting laser beams”; a scene which he then proceeded to act out, flailing his arms about wildly and making

¹ Now the Ontario College of Art and Design University.

whooping noises that we assumed were meant to represent the sound of a Star Trek inspired arsenal laying waste to the city.

I was also warned by my peers ahead of time about yet another instructor who had a reputation for bringing students to tears during critiques; this did not dissuade me, however, and I enrolled in one of her senior painting courses because I respected her work. At the end-of-year critique, true to form, I watched one student sob as the instructor looked at the finished work angrily and asked “I mean...Why the HELL are you wasting our time?”²

Such examples were not, thankfully, the rule. However, as my undergraduate degree wore on, experiences such as these led me to be more critical of what was going on around me, and more curious as to just what – and how – we were being taught. One particular source of constant consternation had to do with how instructors assessed their students. My overwhelming impression of the assessment practices which I observed was that the majority of my instructors used criteria that were at the very least unclear, and at worst possibly non-existent. The exceptions to this were usually those classes which focused on technical skills, such as colour theory or representational work; in such cases, the course outlines we received were often more detailed than those of other courses, with specific objectives and rubrics based on the skills we were meant to learn in class and be able to demonstrate through the assignments we completed.

Critiques were another source of frustration, as seemed to be the case with every art student to whom I spoke. As a forum for assessing our work – for that is what we assumed critiques to be – they were both disconcerting and nerve-wracking. Often long and tiring, and sometimes just boring, one was hard-pressed to say if they had any practical purpose. On the one hand, hours of discussion might go by without anything useful being said; on the other, intense debates might arise regarding any number of subjects, though these were not always relevant to the work actually being discussed. In many ways, critiques encapsulated much of what I felt about my art education in general: they were confusing, unclear, often chaotic,

² I feel it only fair to say that, at the time, I had no problem with this instructor’s behaviour; the work she dismissed so harshly seemed obviously lazy and thrown-together at the last minute. However, looking at this event from a pedagogical standpoint twenty years later, I cannot help but question this instructor’s judgement.

occasionally inspiring, and it was often difficult to tell whether the instructors actually had any control over what was going on.

A few years after graduation, I moved to the United Kingdom where I worked as an Artist-in-Residence at a private school on the Cumbrian coast, and then as a design department technician at an urban secondary school in Nottingham. During that time, I continued to have conversations related to studio art teaching with both students and instructors whenever the opportunity arose, and found that the anecdotal evidence often reinforced the impressions that I had had as an art student

My experiences in the U.K. led me to discover within myself a strong interest in teaching, and after three years, I returned to Canada and to post-secondary education in order to complete my Masters' in Art Education at Concordia University in Montreal. It was at that time that I began to formulate the ideas and questions that underpin the present research. As I worked on my studio-based Master's thesis (Fitch, 2011), I continued to explore matters relating to post-secondary studio art instruction; key amongst my interests was my curiosity regarding assessment.

As I advanced in my academic work, taking courses, going to conferences and making presentations, I sought out those willing and interested in talking about the subject that had me so curious and perplexed. I had decided that I wanted to eventually teach art, but wanted to first gain a better understanding of studio art pedagogy; the problem was that I couldn't quite grasp how that teaching was taking place. I was surprised to find how little literature existed on the subject – a problem which will be examined at greater length in Chapter 2 – and every piece of information I came across seemed to indicate that the subject I was looking at was rife with ambiguity and confusion.

1.2 Thesis Overview

1.2.1 Statement of problem. Currently, assessment standards exist for art teachers at the primary and secondary levels of education and these are an established part of standardized curricula, yet there exists very little literature regarding this same subject at the post-secondary level. The end result, as will be elaborated upon in my literature review, is a sense of confusion as to what actually takes place when university students in the fine arts are assessed by their instructors.

It is worth noting that some may find the notion of assessing art to be all but nonsensical, while others may hold the opposite view; it is my experience that those who fall squarely into one of these two camps often find the opposing opinion to be anathema. For my part, when I first began work on this thesis, I believed that attributing grades to students in studio art was pointless, and that the only logical approach to take was that of a pass/fail system whereby a student could only be penalized for lack of attendance, non-completion of assignments and (in drastic cases) in-class behaviour that was counter to the learning of their peers. By the time I had finished my data collection two years later, however, I had completely changed my mind and embraced the need for grades and rubrics. Now, another two years later, I am undecided, though prone to lean towards the latter rather than the former.

As instructors, artists and researchers, we can argue until the cows come home about whether or not art can or should be assessed; it is unarguably a fascinating subject worth discussing and debating. That being said, it is not the purpose of this research to make an argument either way. The fact of the matter is that as long as post-secondary studio instruction takes place within our current academic system, assessment of art students will not only be expected by the institution, but also by parents, governments, funding bodies and, most importantly, by the students themselves. In our current political and social climate of increased accountability (Budge, 2012; Dineen & Collins, 2005; Salazar, 2013b; Vaughan, S., et al., 2008), when funding to the Fine Arts and the Humanities is under seemingly constant threat, we ignore the problem of assessment – and the accountability that it represents – at our own risk.

1.2.2 Research question. My principal research question is as follows:

A) How do instructors assess students in undergraduate studio courses?

In the process, several sub-questions are also explored. These are:

B) What are the criteria being used in these assessments?

C) What are the reasons for and influences behind these criteria?

D) What is the role of the critique in the process of assessment?

E) How do studio professors communicate values and criteria to students during critiques?

1.2.3 Methodology. For this research, I have used a qualitative approach informed by Merriam (2009), Johnson and Christenson (2008), and Corbin and Strauss (2008). The result is an interpretive multiple case study involving interviews, document analysis and observations, which has as its focus group critiques held during undergraduate studio classes at several North American post-secondary institutions.

Network sampling was used to assemble participants who represented instances relevant to my topic, namely studio art instructors at public, North American post-secondary institutions. A total of fifteen participants from six separate institutions were interviewed, and critique observations were also conducted in ten of the fifteen cases. The resultant data consisting of the transcriptions of the interviews as well as field notes were then analyzed using a constant comparative approach, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and originally formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

1.2.4 Contribution to knowledge.

When I began this project, my overarching goal was to add to the understanding of the pedagogy of post-secondary studio art education by examining how instructors went about the problematic exercise of assessing their students. Indeed, the reader will find that, having reached its completion, the present research is crucial to just such an understanding, and is even more so given the fact that post-secondary studio instruction remains presently a mostly un-theorized teaching tradition.

Currently, North American post-secondary institutions offering studio art based courses list the MFA as the principal requirement for instructors; essentially, this means that current studio students are those who will become our future studio instructors. Researchers agree that studio instructors, having often little to no background in educational theory, tend to teach as they are taught (Barrett, 1988; Carroll, 2006; Lavender, 2003; Salazar, 2013b; Shreeve, et al., 2010). Given this fact, and coupled with the current lack of research on the topic of studio art instruction in general, there is no doubt that this thesis will be of great interest not only to education researchers, instructors and students in art education, but also to current and future instructors in the studio arts.

Furthermore, given how little empirical literature presently exists, an underlying goal was to open a window onto the world of studio art instruction for those readers who are not already ensconced within the field; the inclusion within this thesis of three narrative case-study chapters focussing on individual instructors, as well as many excerpts from the interview transcripts, serves to go beyond the specific subjects at hand – assessment and the critique – to demonstrate the thinking, professionalism, enthusiasm and engagement of instructors, and to do so in part through their own words.

For instructors, this research is of pragmatic pedagogical value in terms of the discussions it opens regarding assessment practices in studio instruction, as well as the variety of approaches to studio critiques that are described within. More importantly, however, what this research will demonstrate is that, despite the laudable efforts of countless studio instructors working day after day with ever increasing class sizes and ever shrinking budgets,

the state of art assessment is just as vague, confusing and generally chaotic as anecdotal evidence and general public perception would indicate.

In particular, this research will single out the studio critique as distinctly problematic, and this despite its signature pedagogical status according to both instructors as well as the field literature. As I will show, the effectiveness of the critique is undermined by a number of assumptions, most importantly that of the efficacy of its place in the process of student assessment. The data discussed within these pages will demonstrate that not only is the critique a singularly ineffective venue for assessment, this very approach to the critique neglects the key objective of studio instruction – and instruction in general – namely *student learning*.

Finally, it is precisely from the point of view of student learning that I will advance the notion of the MetaCritique. Essentially, what I present is an approach to the critique that shifts the focus from assessment to that of self-reflective learning, and from the students' artwork to the student themselves. By doing so, learning objectives which are otherwise questionably attributed to the process of critiques as they are currently conducted are more concretely and effectively addressed, as well as being made explicit to students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with an explanation of the research procedures used and the difficulties encountered during the process of compiling the literature review. I then move on to an overview of the existing research before examining what the literature has to say about assessment in post-secondary studio art, focusing on the role played by the critique within the assessment process.

2.1 Research Procedures

The review for this study was conducted using online databases including JSTOR, ERIC, Art Full Text and Academic Search Complete. Focusing on articles and publications related to teaching post-secondary studio art in English speaking countries, key terms used included “studio art assessment”, “studio critiques” and “post-secondary art education”, as well as parts and variations thereof.

Results of searches using the term “critique” in terms of a pedagogical practice revealed that it is used in fields other than studio art; principally design and architecture. Indeed, some search results included articles which, though alluding to studio art as well as design in their abstracts or titles, in fact focused principally on the latter. Generally, however, an overview of these sources indicated that the differences between how the critique is approached in different fields is such that they were not deemed relevant to the present study.

2.2 Lack of Research Concerning Post-Secondary Studio Art

To begin, it is important to note that my literature review itself revealed an important piece of data: namely, the lack of either general literature or empirical research pertaining to

studio art and its assessment. Numerous authors have come to similar conclusions (Cannatella, 2001; Edstrom, 2008; Elton, 2006; de la Harpe, et al., 2009; Harwood, 2007), and it is particularly dramatic to observe the literature reviews conducted by Lachapelle (1991) and Salazar (2013a, 2013b) which similarly decry the lack of research involving the direct observation of interaction between students and instructors. Evidently, little had changed in the almost quarter century that separates their respective work.

One key reason for this situation may be the practical fact that in many institutions instructors in studio arts tend to have little, if any, experience or training in educational theory when they begin their teaching careers for the simple reason that North American post-secondary institutions offering studio art based courses list the MFA as the principal requirement for instructors (Barrett, 1988; Carroll, 2006; Lavender, 2003; Morrisroe & Roland, 2008; Salazar, 2013b; Shreeve, et al., 2010). Unsurprisingly, then, instructors may therefore lack the experience or theoretical foundations for the forms of academic writing which are required from their colleagues in other fields (Klebesadel & Kornetsky, 2009, 104).

The preceding issue is further compounded by a system of promotion and tenure that is mainly predicated upon artistic accomplishments (Bersson, 2005). Whereas in other departments professors are encouraged, if not to say required, to publish books and articles related to their fields, studio art instructors are generally judged by their exhibition history and the attention given to their artistic output by the outside world. Although there is a great deal that can be said against the academic “publish or perish” mentality which emphasizes quantity over quality and research over teaching, its analogous studio cousin, “exhibit or perish”, is little better. By emphasizing artistic production above all else, studio instructors are neither encouraged to focus on their teaching, nor to read or write literature relevant to the educational aspects of their academic roles (Salazar, 2014).

2.3 The Critique

A key recurring theme within the literature was the importance attributed to the use of dialogic studio feedback – more commonly referred to as the critique – within the domain of studio art education. Indeed, many authors clearly considered the critique to be the essential assessment method in the studio arts (Barrett, 2000; Bulka, 1996; Elkins, 2001; Klebesadel, 2006; Owens, 2007).

Described by Barrett (2000) as "dialogues between instructors and students that engage the different perspectives of the instructor, the student whose art is being critiqued, and the student artist's peers" (p. 30), in its most basic format a critique involves a classroom of students and their instructor assembled together for the purpose of viewing and discussing the students' artwork. In the process of discussion, questions are often asked of the students/artists concerning decisions made during their creative process, and suggestions and value judgments are expressed by their peers and instructor concerning the works presented.

The notion of publicly discussing student work for the purpose of evaluation and edification is one that dates back to the Romantic period. Historically, instructors judged their students' efforts in private, ranking them in order of perceived success. Work would then be handed back to the student with no advice or explanation other than their numerical ranking. This opaque form of evaluation was an important factor in the rejection of art academies by the Romantic Movement in the nineteenth century, and the resulting approach to judging artworks in a dialogical manner is one that has continued to the present day (Elkins, 2001).

2.4 Lack of Research Concerning the Critique

Despite its stated importance, however, my literature review mirrored those of Kent (2001), Nan (2009), and Klebesadel and Kornetsky (2009), which found little to no research on critiques or performance assessment in the post-secondary studio arts. Within the larger context of research into post-secondary studio teaching as a whole, the critique emerges as a subject only rarely, and usually consists of but a small section of the topic under consideration.

For example, Logan's (2013) study into the learning process of Fine Art students only mentions in passing the critique's role in fostering peer dialogue and teaching students the need for establishing critical distance between themselves and their work (p. 39), while James' (1996) holistic investigation of a studio sculpture class contains a mainly descriptive account of the critiques that were observed. "Critique is so fundamental", Klebesadel and Kornetsky (2009) explain ironically, "that there appears to be no need to talk about it, much less study its effectiveness and what students learn about the creative arts through the process" (p. 104).

This lack of focussed research implies that much of what has been written concerning the studio art critique, both in praise and in censure, is based on primarily anecdotal evidence. This is aptly illustrated by Owens (2007) article *Classroom Critiques: Transforming Conformity into Creativity*, in which the author applauds the critique's Socratic underpinnings and advocates its use across the disciplines in order to promote critical thinking and even help build better democratic citizens. However, the entire article is littered with caveats concerning the lack of research to properly substantiate such claims, and he concludes that "most of the evidence supporting classroom critique's efficacy is anecdotal or subjective" (p. 9), and has been documented in only "limited and indirect ways" (p. 3). Similarly, Klebesadel and Kornetsky (2009) describe at length the many goals and positive attributes of the critique as a signature pedagogy, yet their praise is based primarily on Klebesadel's personal experiences as an art educator, and research by Barrett (1988, 2000).

2.5 Overview of Critique Research

Indeed, American art critic and educator Terry Barrett's research on the art studio art critique cannot but shine by virtue of its solitude. In 1988, he published the findings of a comparison between the goals of art criticism as expressed in educational literature and those of post-secondary studio instructors conducting course critiques.

Through interviews with nineteen instructors at a large Midwestern university, he observed that the art criticism that took place during critiques was much more limited and

narrow in its goals than that was being taught in art education courses. Data indicated that, whereas art education literature approached art criticism as “a subject in itself” (Barrett, 1988, p. 25), its principal objective according to studio instructors was to make judgements on student artworks using intentionalist criteria.

The author concluded that a “one size fits all” mentality, where critiques were conducted almost identically no matter whether the students were at the undergraduate or graduate level, or whether they were specializing in art or merely taking a single elective, did not adequately take into account the differences between the educational goals of these disparate student populations. Furthermore, he argued that a more wide-ranging approach to art criticism, with a stronger emphasis on viewer interpretation and class discussion as well as more clearly defined evaluative criteria, could lead to more effective and engaging learning opportunities for art students.

A subsequent study (2000), one much larger in scope, involved a survey that examined the views of over 80 instructors and more than 1000 students from 17 public and private universities, colleges and art academies in the United States, Canada and Australia. Results indicated that much of the anecdotal information regarding critiques described earlier in this chapter seemed to be true. Instructors found critiques to be essential, but challenging. Student apathy and lack of participation was a major issue. Both students and instructors voiced concerns that critiques could leave students discouraged when instructors became too domineering and the feedback concerning artwork focused too strongly on the negative. Some recounted personal experiences of having their work physically damaged or destroyed and being publically humiliated. Respondents were in general agreement that successful critiques were those where animated discussions between participants engaged with both the weaknesses and strengths of the artworks, revealing multiple viewpoints leaving students with a renewed enthusiasm for their work.

Despite the apparent scale of the research, however, the published findings do not include much more detail than the above overview. No quantitative information was given regarding the frequency of positive and negative statements, whether specific or general, and

Barrett's primary conclusion is that critiques would be more effective if instructors were more aware of their own teaching methods and adopted a more respectful and caring approach to their teaching, which he discusses in terms of "mentoring".

2.5.1 Graduate research. Graduate student theses and dissertations, though few in number, do uncover further relevant research. Once again, however, several of these only refer to the critique as a small part of their subject matter and findings.

Such is the case of Nan's (2009) doctoral case study of the teaching of drawing and painting at Florida State University which only briefly mentions the key role critiques played within the department as a feedback and assessment method that cultivate critical thinking (p. 182). Similarly Sanborn's (2002) study of students taking a university ceramics course mentions in passing the importance of the critique in building a sense of community amongst peers in the classroom.

Despite not centering on the subject of critiques, Kushins' (2007) descriptive case studies of the first year foundations programs at two respected American art institutions, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the College of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon University is of particular interest. Despite the high regard in which these two institutions were placed, Kushins observed that most course critiques were run in the standard format where each student introduced their work and a brief discussion ensued during which the course instructor did most of the talking³. Notably, students were almost never given guidelines or instructions as to what was expected of them. Instead, they were simply "expected to intuitively understand the purposes and processes of engaging in critiques" (p. 168).

For their part, Kent (2001), Soep (2000) and Doren (2011) hold the critique as the focus of their dissertations, though the latter in a somewhat tangential fashion.

³ See 5.2.1 The conventional crit.

Starting from a belief that critiques are primarily an exercise in assessment, Doren (2011) interviewed five studio art instructors in order to examine how their methods of studio practice self-assessment could be applied to post-secondary studio education. It is worth noting, however, that the author's generally negative descriptions of how critiques are conducted – that they are mainly summative assessments that do not seek to generate new meaning (p. 14), that they are Modernist exercises that focus on product and originality over process, and that they are often essentially “meaningless” (p. 177) – does not seem to be based on any particular research other than their own experiences. Although other instructors' views of critiques might have indicated whether such opinions were more widely shared, a serious weakness of this research, as Doren acknowledges, is its failure to interview the participants about their teaching as well as their studio practice. The result is that the conclusions reached – namely that critiques should be a more dialogical process that focus on ambiguity, inquiry, reflection and empowerment – seem to be predicated on the questionable notion that there is a valid and useful correlation to be made between what constitutes creation in the artist's studio and the teaching of art within a studio classroom.

Kent's (2001) doctoral dissertation analyzing the one-on-one critiques of a single studio art instructor concluded that exemplary studio teaching involved demonstrating life-long learning, being able to communicate to students the importance of artists in society, and a caring teaching approach melded with an awareness of authority. This broadly correlated to similar findings the author had reached in a narrative study conducted previously in which she examined the critique methods of three instructors at the same institution (Kent, 1998).

Soep (2000) focused on the group critiques that took place during two non-school community youth projects and examined how the dynamics of the critiques changed during the course of the evolution of the two projects. Data analysis revealed the complex and dynamic quality of the critique, emphasizing four main characteristics which gave the critique its “unique learning opportunities and risks” (p. 158) in comparison to other forms of educational interaction and assessment. These were: face-to-face improvisation, reciprocity, presence of the maker(s), and orientation to future production.

Amongst her findings, the author noted that the complexity and fluidity of the critique is in large part due to the role played by social interaction, improvisation and language.

Critique is, by definition, a verbal exercise. It requires facility with words, as well as a certain interactional finesse, both of which are determined by the particular set of participants and circumstances shaping any instance of critique. The modes of thought critique evokes may be educationally meritorious, and even aesthetic in their own right. These competencies, however, are not identical to those involved in artistic production. Critique is mediated primarily through the persuasions of rhetoric. As a result, “good talkers” may thrive in critique, potentially stifling or co-opting the contributions of others. (p. 81)

2.5.2 The “grey literature”. Such is the scarcity of empirical research on the subject that sources which fall under the category of “grey literature” (Ridley, 2012; Jesson, Matheson, & Lacey, 2011) should not be ignored. The term *grey literature* refers to writing which may well be considered academic in subject matter, but has not been peer-reviewed. Although lacking in this key element of institutional recognition, I would argue that at the very least they create an important and believable snapshot of various issues related to the critique.

One important example is *Critiquing the Crit*, a report produced by Blythman, Orr, and Blair (2007a) for the U.K. Higher Education Academy (HEA)⁴. The report aimed to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the critique as a teaching and learning method in art and design, and collect examples of good practice. Using interviews and observations with instructors from the UK and abroad as well as student focus groups the authors produced a student handbook, staff development materials and a staff handbook. Major strengths of the critique emphasized in the report included its key role in presenting feedback to students from their instructors and peers, the development of critical thinking and presentation skills, and the potential for dialogic approaches.

⁴Higher Education Academy (HEA) is a U.K. national body for enhancing learning and teaching in higher education. Further information regarding its research can be found at <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/about>.

However, findings also reported that there was a lack of evidence that much peer feedback actually took place during critiques, and that summative assessment seemed to be emphasized over formative assessment, despite the latter's greater usefulness in helping students build their knowledge and skills.

Importantly, large critiques were not seen as having many strengths. As well as finding them to be "emotionally charged", students "generally found them to be too long, difficult to hear feedback to other students [sic] and inhibiting when presenting to the whole group, especially for shy or international students" (Blythman, Orr, & Blair, 2007b, p. 1). Given that large critiques are often the norm, the above would seem to put into question to what extent the alleged strengths of the critique actually materialized in reality.

Overall, the report seemed to support many of the issues outlined earlier in this chapter. However, once again a lack of detailed information make it difficult to ascertain just how widespread and influential the various strengths and weaknesses of the critique actually were. A further issue lies in the fact that this research amalgamated both critiques in art and design, revealing the assumption that critiques in these two fields functioned in the same way. In addition, the report often referred specifically to design education, possibly indicating that its focus was more on design than studio art teaching.

2.5.2.1 Student guides. Finally, it is worth examining the guides by Kendall and Crawford (2010), Rowles (2013) and Elkins (2014). These are principally written to help students navigate the critiques that take place in their courses and give them a better understanding of what the experience of the critique entails. Like most of the literature on critiques, however, these are not products of research per se, but rather the culmination of the specific authors' years of experience teaching studio art and the practical as well as anecdotal evidence that they have accumulated in the process. Their content is nonetheless useful in terms of understanding issues related to the critique, and Elkins' (2001, 2014) books in particular are often to be found mentioned in both primary and secondary sources on studio art education.

Clearly written with the student as its principal audience, Kendall and Crawford's *The Critique Handbook: The Art Student's Sourcebook and Survival Guide* is broadly divided into two sections entitled *Framing the Discussion* and *Having the Discussion*, more than half of the book focuses on the various ways one can understand and discuss a work of art, from the purely formal to issues of social, political and cultural context. Emphasis is placed on the difficulties inherent in trying to establish which approach to take during a critique given the seemingly limitless possibilities open to artists in the twenty-first century. Examples include how postcolonial and feminist discourses have expanded and complicated the role of the nude (p. 46), the effect of such concepts as appropriation and the ready-made on the place of technical skill (p. 66), and the problematics of critiquing site-specific or ephemeral artworks (p. 73).

While undoubtedly interesting and relevant for students, this first section says little about critiques themselves, focusing rather on the intellectual context in which they take place. Unfortunately, only one of the two chapters that comprise the second section of the book focusses on the actual dynamics of the critique. This latter section mainly serves to give advice as to how to get the most out of the critique experience, which can be generally summarized by the prescriptions: don't take critiques personally (p. 93), learn to listen (p. 94), be humble (p. 97) and be prepared (p. 95).

That being said, specifically because it is clearly not written for instructors, this handbook gives a clear sense of how the critique is experienced by those who suffer its potential "slings and arrows" most keenly, namely the student. A section entitled *Who is Critiquing You* (p. 96) gives a list of possible categories that participants in a critique can fall into, including the connoisseur, the judge, the narcissist and the unconditional supporter, amongst others. It can be of use for instructors to contemplate where they see themselves within this range of types, and under what category their students might see them as well. Additionally, it serves as a very useful primer for students seeking a better understanding of, and preparation for, the experience of the critique.

Another student guide of note is *Art Crits: 20 questions, a pocket guide*, edited by Susan Rowles (2013) and produced by Q-Art, a British arts collective with a particular interest in post-

secondary art education and its relationship to the contemporary art world⁵. This guide sets out to explain to students what a critique entails, what forms it can take, the barriers they may face and ways to circumvent them. What sets the book apart, and makes it relevant as a piece of, albeit “grey”, research, is that all the above sections are composed almost exclusively of quotes from interviews with 30 instructors from across the U.K. The result is a valuable collection of advice that also gives the reader a detailed and practical overview of the critique in post-secondary art education.

In 2001, art-historian, critic and theoretician James Elkins published a highly contentious and entertaining book entitled *Why Art Cannot be Taught*, in which he discussed the ways in which art has been taught throughout Western history, and the social and cultural changes that have led to its present incarnation. Within this discussion was a chapter dedicated to critiques where the author analyzed what actually occurs in a critique rather than theorizing about its potential as a method of assessment. His overall conclusion was a scathing critique of the critique; Elkins argued that the way they are generally organized, or not organized, is so amorphous, so open-ended, so full of potential digressions, that any structured sense of learning is all but impossible.

But surely people who conduct and take part in art critiques intend them to be something other than disordered conversations. We call them *critiques* [italics in text], distinguishing them from tests, conversations, and parties, and alighting them with the eighteenth-century concept of a critique as an ordered rational inquiry. If we meant only “conversation”, we would say so. (p. 121)

A decade later, the author further elaborated upon this subject in the first edition of *Art Critiques: A Guide*, with two expanded editions released subsequently. Written as a guide to help students get the most out of critiques, the third and final edition of the book (2014) covers a wide range of factors that affect how a critique takes place, from the purely practical (class sizes are too large for each student’s work to be properly critiqued) and the personal

⁵ More information can be found on their website at <http://q-art.org.uk/>.

(instructors can be biased against particular art forms), to the more technical (judicative versus descriptive critiques).

Within its over four dozen chapters are a multitude of accounts and examples taken from the author's personal experiences at teaching institutions across the United States as well as over a dozen other countries. These are augmented with further anecdotes sent to the author via a number of "call outs" made on his Facebook page and website. Elkins' descriptions and analysis are interspersed with practical suggestions of what students and instructors can say or do in order to get their audience (and themselves) to avoid generalized pronouncements and delve deeper than their first impressions of work; anything to "throw the panelists off balance just a little, and keep their minds open a bit longer" (p. 48).

Such are the number and variety of problems related to critiques that Elkins manages to assemble over fifty chapters in the space of just over two hundred pages. The brevity of many of these chapters (the majority are less than five pages in length) is undoubtedly due to the fact that Elkins does not try to find answers to every problem – indeed, if such answers existed, critiques would be much simpler to navigate, and a book such as this one would not have been necessary.

Of greater interest and practicality are the chapters devoted to *Allegories for Critiques* (chapters 38-42). Singularly ontological in nature, it is in here perhaps that Elkins gets closest to finding a practical approach to gaining an understanding of many of the aspects of critiques that make them so difficult. By using other forms of social interaction as allegories, (for example, one chapter likens their emotional nature to seductions; another compares their tension to court trials) Elkins gives the reader several lenses through which to try to understand and appreciate the experience of the critique.⁶

⁶The complete list of Elkin's allegories includes: seductions, battles, translations, court trials, and storytelling.

2.6 An Overview of the Critique According to the Literature.

2.6.1 The critique as signature pedagogy. The significance of the critique is such that it is considered to be a *signature pedagogy* both in the field of the fine arts (Klebesadel & Kornetsky, 2009) as well as that of design (Schrand & Eliason, 2012).

The notion of *signature pedagogy* was coined by Shulman (2005) in his work with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He uses this term to describe the characteristic forms of teaching and views of knowledge that are considered to be intrinsic to particular fields of learning. Shulman (2005) explains that such pedagogies tend to share a number of common features. Firstly, they can be observed to be widespread across their specific field of education; no matter the particular course, program or even institution. Indeed, their prevalence is such that they are the “forms of instruction that leap to mind when we first think about the preparation of members of particular professions” (p. 52). Secondly, they often involve that the student perform before an audience, usually consisting of their peers as well as their instructor. This emphasis on public performance forces students to contribute openly to discussion and dialogue, thus taking responsibility for their own knowledge making and helping to reduce what Shulman (2005) considers to be the greatest barrier to learning in higher education, namely “passivity, invisibility, anonymity, and lack of accountability” (p. 57). However, despite this clearly positive outcome, this also can lead to high levels of anxiety and add a strong emotional component to the proceedings, which is the third feature Shulman (2005) lists as common to signature pedagogies.

Enumerating these features, it is not difficult to see how the studio critique fits into the signature pedagogy framework. Critiques are a ubiquitous part of nearly every studio course, and invariably involve some form of participation and open dialogue within a group. Finally, they are also notoriously fraught proceedings where emotional outbursts are not uncommon, a point which will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.

2.6.2 Objectives of the critique. An overview of the literature indicates that critiques are generally considered to have four principal objectives: Assessment, Feedback, Skill development, and Professionalization.

2.6.2.1 Assessment. The critique is generally considered to have two principal didactic roles. The first is that of assessment. Rather than instructors simply sitting alone with a student's work and deciding on an appropriate grade, the critique allows for a dialogue to take place between the instructor, the student, the student's peers, and the work. Soep (2005) states that this is a rare case where students are given the opportunity to engage more fully in their learning through forms of in-depth peer and self-assessment. Furthermore, Klebesadel and Kornetsky (2009) explain, critiques also result in much more coherent assessments as students are given the opportunity to observe "how [the] faculty articulate the criteria that will be used to assess their academic performance" (p. 111). "Criteria for evaluation", they continue "are transparent and understood by all, so the assessment is fair, and students have a way of measuring their progress and learning to use their creative voices positively to judge the work of their peers" (p. 116).

2.6.2.2 Feedback. The second key didactic function of the critique in the learning process is that of feedback communication not only between the instructor and individual student, but also between each student and their peers (Kushins, 2007). Often critiques are conducted not only once final projects have been completed, but also at one or several points during the length of the course itself in order for students to gain understanding regarding their progress, strengths, weaknesses, etc. Such in-progress critiques serve as "opportunities for immediate feedback, dialogue, and clarification" that are formative, rather than summative (Schrand & Eliason, 2012, p. 52).

2.6.2.3 Skill development. The critique is further considered to have benefits that go far beyond matters of assessment and feedback. Klebesadel and Kornetsky (2009) and Sloan and Nathan (2005), for example, make the claim that technical craft, effective artistic expression, self-reflection, critical thinking and risk-taking are all developed, "fostering creativity and critical student voices as emerging artists learn to articulate their goals" (p. 113). Additionally, due to the fact that critiques often occur several times during the same class, a collaborative relationship is often established between the students and their instructor (Klebesadel and Kornetsky, p. 112).

Linking the critique to the philosophical tradition of Socratic learning, Owens (2007) also claims that its dialogic nature makes it a singular tool for developing critical thinking skills and analytic rigor. As a teaching method that emphasizes interactivity over knowledge transmission, he explains that the critique helps privilege deeper learning and encourages student enthusiasm. He further suggests that critiques can serve as a potential remedy for high stakes, summative assessment, "to alleviate inadequate academic preparation of . . . students" (p. 3), and even goes so far as to claim that it can play an important role in fostering more democratic and civically minded students within an increasingly globalized economy (p. 8).

Such is their enthusiasm for the critique that Sloan and Nathan (2005) and Schrand and Eliason (2012) join Owens (2007) in advocating its use in subjects other than those in which it has traditionally been the method of assessment. Similarly, Short (1998) and House (2008) make the case that the critique as assessment method, with its student participation, discussion and use of art historical comparisons, could also be applied to secondary school classrooms with obvious benefits to the overall learning experience of students.

2.6.2.4 Professionalization. But perhaps above and beyond these particular characteristics, the critique is often seen as serving a very particular role as pedagogical tool for introducing students to a particular community of practice. Indeed, my literature review uncovered strong arguments claiming that studio art teaching in general is essentially meant to serve as professional training.

Klebesadel and Kornetsky (2009) explain that the critique's role in this professionalization is to "teach core disciplinary understandings of how the visual arts and artists function in society" (p. 111). "The majority of students", they explain, "hope to make their careers as practitioners of these art forms, so much of the focus is on how to be that practitioner, rather than on creating new knowledge within a traditional scholarly mode" (p. 101). Dannels (2005) and Vaughan et al. (2008) emphasize the role played by the oral aspect of design critiques in student professionalization, which teaches them to "speak and to understand the language of their particular practice" (p. 20). The underlying lesson is that, in order to become professionals in their field, students must learn and adopt the language that is introduced to them through critiques.

Returning to the notion of the critique as signature pedagogy, Shulman (2005) observes that the most distinctly interesting such pedagogies tend to be found precisely in those disciplines that lead directly to specific professions. In her discussion on art history education, Calder (2006) explains that signature pedagogies require students to "do, think, and value what practitioners in the field are doing, thinking, and valuing". As such, they "disclose important information about the personality of a disciplinary field—its values, knowledge, and manner of thinking—almost, perhaps, its total world view" (p. 1361). Essentially, they go beyond the learning of theory and the accumulation of knowledge, to prepare students for the practice of a profession.

2.6.3 But "crits suck".

Yet despite the positive attributes to which the critique is ascribed, there seems to be a vast gulf lying between its theoretical strengths and the way it is actually practiced and perceived. Indeed, critiques have a strong cultural lore of being vague, unstructured, emotionally charged and highly subjective (Elkins, 2001; Jones, 1996; Klebesadel, 2006; Percy, 2003).

2.6.3.1 Subjectivity. Blair (2006) explains that this is at least in part due to the very nature of creative projects.

There is no one right answer, known final destination or conclusion to a given problem or project. Teachers and students give opinions based on experience and tacit knowledge, but as there is no one definitive or right solution, these opinions are, in the main, subjective. This can often result in the student receiving conflicting and sometimes, what students regard as, non-related feedback from a variety of individuals. (p. 83)

Fendrich (2007) elaborates on another problem related to the issue of subjectivity, explaining that the very notion that artistic (read: aesthetic) opinions are essentially subjective stems from the wholesale adoption by the academy of post-modern historicism. Such relativism, she argues, cannot but lead to the further undermining of the critique as a useful tool for serious discussion.

2.6.3.2 Student confidence. The social, public nature of the critique is also problematic; Bulka (1996) describes them as “test[s] of fire, where a student’s work, ideas, and sometimes self-confidence, self-image, and soul are subject to the scrutiny of his or her instructors and . . . peers” (p. 22).

Blair (2006) argues that critiques can have a profound impact on students’ self-perception, which in turn “can substantially affect the cognitive resources a student applies” to their learning in the critique situation (p. 86). Put simply, the critique can be so nerve-wracking that the student will be more focused on their fears than on their learning.

The inclusion of an audience of students and sometimes more than one instructor can also be a source of tension. As Mers (2013) describes, “panelists may be impatient, insufficiently attentive, prejudiced, self-centered, or just poorly matched; and peers may be disinterested or inarticulate” (p. 91). Furthermore, power struggles can come into effect, and conflicts between individuals can turn the critique into a forum for personal vendettas and

egotistical displays by its participants, be they students or instructors (Bulka, 1996; Blair, 2006; Barrett, 2000; Jones, 1996; Klebesadel, 2006; Percy, 2006; Soep, 2000).

Emotional outbursts are also a potential risk, especially when discussing artworks that are rooted in the artist's personal history. Art making is often a very personal endeavor, with the artist often considering their artwork to be a direct reflection of and on themselves (Elkins, 2001; Wernik, 1983). Yet articulating this relationship is a notoriously difficult task; as a consequence, Shreeve, Sims and Trowler (2010) explain, students feel deeply engaged with their work, and “this generates anxiety around risk-taking and presenting and defending ideas” (p. 129). This can only exacerbate the pre-existing stress that most individuals experience when forced to speak in front of a group.

2.6.3.3 The role of language. All of these issues are further compounded by a certain critique culture; there is an element of theater which can make or break how a student's work is viewed depending on whether they know how to play the game (Blair, 2006; Elkins, 2001). Soep (2000) specifically refers to the element of performance and “face-to-face improvisation” that a critique entails (p. 73).

More specifically, there is also a vocabulary that is particular to critiques; the awareness, understanding, and application of which can affect a student's success. Though, in the case of studio critiques, the main subject under consideration is usually visual in nature, the majority of the communication involved happens through oral dialogue. In her research on design education, Dannels (2005) refers to critiques as one of several *oral genres* in which students are required to take part. Amongst the research findings was the observation that one of the key skills needed in order to achieve success in critiques is that of being able to understand and use discipline-specific vocabulary, or *jargon* (p. 150).

The fact that the role of discipline-specific language is often under-valued means that it can also serve as an important impediment to student learning. Citing McManus's (2005) research on the role of language in admissions interviews to higher education art and design

programs, Reid (2007) points out that it is not uncommon to find situations where the capacity to “speak the language” of instructors will give a student the upper hand over a fellow student whose work is considered to be of the same quality but who doesn’t have knowledge of the implicitly expected vocabulary. Essentially, they are able to “talk their way” into the program.

The author goes on to explain that this facility, or lack thereof, with discipline-specific language can have a profound impact on a student’s future success as well. “Students who are unable to articulate confidently and conventionally about their work”, she explains, “can come to feel inferior, to doubt their abilities, to wonder whether they really belong in an art school, and are thus prone to non-completion or failure (p. 2).” Instructors, for their part, then assume that this lack of linguistic proficiency is “an indication of a corresponding lack of creative potential” (p. 3).

Within design education once again, Percy (2006) questions whether the critique, a primarily oral exercise, can serve to demonstrate the understanding of often tacit skills that are principally learned through practice. Students’ primary form of learning, she explains “is essentially constructive rather than deductive” (p. 146), and it is therefore questionable to assume that students would be capable of articulating their practice in a coherent and self-aware fashion without specific prior preparation. Yet, whilst the author’s research at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design in the U.K. found much evidence of students being advised on what to bring to the critique and how to organize their work for presentation, there was little evidence of students being taught the skills of critical reflection and argument (p. 147).

Furthermore, Percy’s (2006) data also indicated that even the instructors themselves were ill prepared to effectively utilize the critique’s communicative potential. “Rather than demonstrating a virtuosity of language”, she explains, “they would resort to the use of imprecise and general terms, unconsciously relying on their accompanying non-verbal and gestural behaviour to convey meaning” (p. 149).

2.7 Concluding Remarks

The critique is seemingly indicative of the state of post-secondary art assessment in general; confusing, chaotic and fraught with misunderstandings and uncertainty.

In the last decade and a half, researchers in education as well as communication theory have begun to examine the culture of the critique – their structures, formats, etc. – in such fields as architecture and design (Dannels & Norris, 2008; Dannels, Housely & Norris, 2011; Klebesadel & Kornetsky, 2009), pointing towards the necessity for greater self-awareness by instructors across all fields regarding its effects on student learning and performance. However, little attention has been given to its iteration within studio art education; what little literature on the subject there is tends to be based on personal experience and anecdotal evidence.

Klebesadel and Kornetsky (2009) bemoan this lack of empirical research: "if we understood what is happening in critique", they explain, "we would be able to design models that lead to deeper learning and more explicit outcomes for students" (p. 105).

Given its clearly essential pedagogical role within post-secondary art education, this lack of understanding of the critique stands as a major obstacle to a better understanding of how post-secondary studio art education functions as a whole.

As Elkins (2001) concludes in *Why Art Cannot Be Taught*,

The fact that there is no good theory about art critiques does not bode well for the possibility of understanding what actually happens in art classes. There is no model, no classical text that might help guide us. That is the first reason why critiques are hard to understand. (p. 119)

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

For this research, I have used a qualitative approach informed by Merriam (2009), Johnson and Christenson (2008), and Corbin and Strauss (2008). The result is an interpretive multiple case study involving interviews, document analysis and observations, which has as its focus group critiques held during undergraduate studio classes at several North American post-secondary institutions. In this chapter, I describe the chosen methodology of this project – the multiple case study - as well as the reasoning behind its choice. I then discuss certain problematic issues related to this methodology, focusing on the problem of the generalizability of findings, before describing in detail the stages of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

3.1 The Multiple-Case Study

Case study research is generally described as a qualitative approach which allows the researcher to explore a given issue or issues through the in-depth analysis of one or more cases over time. Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined” (p. 13). Within the context of this research, the phenomenon being researched is the assessment of art students and their work using multiple cases represented by post-secondary studio art instructors.

Historically, there has been some confusion amongst researchers as to whether case study is in fact a methodology at all. Merriam (1998) explains that this is mainly due to an issue of semantics, as the term *case* can be used to indicate simultaneously the process of the research, the unit of study itself as well as the resultant research product (p. 27). However, there is a consensus that case study involves a set of particular characteristics that differentiate it from other methodologies and therefore warrant that it be considered a methodology onto itself (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). One such key characteristic is the way that the object of

study is delimited by the notion of the *case*, which can be defined as a phenomenon which occurs within a bounded system (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). For example, this could be a particular policy or pedagogical model. A variation of this is when the case itself is the issue being investigated, such as a particular business or school, because it is in some way singular or unusual. This latter form of case study is referred to as an *intrinsic*, as opposed to *singular* or *multiple*, case study (Creswell, 2007, p. 74).

According to Merriam (1998), case study can be used in conjunction with a variety of disciplinary orientations depending on the subject at hand; such orientations include ethnography, history, sociology and psychology (p. 34). Additionally, case study can even incorporate quantitative along with qualitative data (Merriam, 1998; Demetriou, 2009), thus potentially increasing its perceived validity in the eyes of those skeptical of qualitative research methods in general. Finally, a case study can also take on a different format depending upon the final intent of the research, which, according to Yin (2003) can be exploratory, explanatory or descriptive.

The above described versatility means that case study is of particular use to educational researchers, especially when they seek to identify and explain specific issues and problems of practice. As Merriam (1998) explains:

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding [a] phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base [E]ducational processes, problems, and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice. (p. 41)

Finally, the interpretive case study in particular uses rich, thick description, and is especially useful for exploring phenomena for which there is a lack of theory (Merriam, 1998; Torraco, 2005), making it a methodology particularly suited to the subject of the present thesis.

3.2 On the Generalizability of Findings

Case study, however, is not without its detractors. Qualitative research methodologies in general have historically been accused of a number of inherent weaknesses, such as the risk of researcher bias, especially when the primary instrument of data collection is the researcher him or herself, and the inherent intrusiveness of the researcher on the person or persons being studied (i.e. observer effect) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Walker, 1983).

Perhaps the most problematic issue related to case study research, however, is that of generalization, or external validity. Broadly speaking, generalizability is not considered to be a principal goal of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). However, given the above, one might understandably be driven to ask what the point is of researching a phenomenon if what is learnt cannot be applied to other similar instances.

Stake (1995) explains that the goal of establishing generalizations stems from the scientific underpinnings of quantitative research. Within this paradigm, unique cases within a group are considered to be exceptions that should be ignored and eliminated in order to create an overarching theory. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, are often of the opinion that it is precisely those exceptions that are integral to creating understanding (p. 39). Stake's view is that the goal of case study is not so much the creation of generalizations, but rather the refinement and modification of pre-existing generalizations from other sources: "seldom is an entirely new understanding reached but refinement of understanding is" (p. 7).

Similarly, Ellinger, Watkins and Marsick (2005) also state that case study research is more suited to exploring and understanding problems than necessarily finding solutions.

The answers gained through [case study] research will not directly solve the problem of practice but will shed light on where the problem resides; where interventions are needed; the kind of action that will get desired results; or how to work with structure, culture, or other contextual factors in a setting that influences results. (p. 334)

Despite the above observations, the question of generalizability is nevertheless a recurrent one within literature on qualitative research methodologies. The problem perhaps lies in the fact that qualitative researchers seem often to avoid the issue of generalizability by using terms that are meant to cover the *notion* of generalizability without the empirical implications that stem from its use in quantitative circles. Unfortunately, it would seem that there is no consensus as to what that term should be, which only serves to add to the confusion regarding this matter. For example, Cronbach refers to *working hypothesis* so that any generalization one might be tempted to make is never concrete and always underscored with uncertainty. Similarly, Patton uses the term *extrapolation* in much the same way (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 225).

For my part, I find myself partial to Yin's (2003) approach, whereby he makes a distinction between *statistical generalizability* and *analytical generalizability* in which "the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory" (p. 37). Yin also argues that just as it is standard practice in scientific research to use repeated experiments to verify a claim, so the multiple-case study includes several sites so as to strengthen its validity.

In fact, scientific facts are rarely based on single experiments; they are usually based on a multiple set of experiments that have replicated the same phenomenon under different conditions. The same approach can be used with multiple-case studies but requires a different concept of the appropriate research designs The short answer is that case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a sample, and in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalizations) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization). (p. 10)

Thus, once each case of a multiple case study has been independently analyzed, they can then be compared one to another in order to discover recurring themes, a process which Yin refers to as a *cross-case synthesis* (p. 134). Creswell (2007) emphasizes that such a multi-

case study requires that only representative cases are chosen and that there be a clear rationale for the sampling strategy used (p. 76). Additionally, using predetermined interview questions and analysis strategies would further ensure analytic generalizability (Yin, 2003, p. 37).

But perhaps the problem of generalizations is not a problem at all or at least not one that can ever entirely be resolved. I would argue that it is an inherent trait of human beings to generalize; we make assumptions and come to conclusions based on our immediate experiences and the proof that we have before us. When presented with research, the reader will reach their own conclusions and make their own generalizations, no matter how many caveats we include regarding the inherent lack of generalizability of our findings. As we cannot control or anticipate what notions a given reader might have, nor can we expect to control how the research presented to them will be applied to their pre-existing knowledge. In that sense, any discussion about the problem of generalization needs to take into account the role of the reader within the research dynamic.

Stake (1995) makes precisely this point when he posits that the reader is just as important a participant in research as the subject of subjects being studied and the researcher him or herself. He explains that the reader brings with them pre-existing generalizations stemming from their personal experiences as well as from other external sources such as books, teachers, the media etc. Any new generalizations that they make from a piece of research are therefore just as much the product of their previously held knowledge as that of the research itself (p. 86). This notion, which Merriam (1998) describes as *reader or user generalizability* (p. 211), means that it is left up to the reader to decide to what extent particular research findings might apply to other cases. Usefully, she also adds that such an approach “is common practice in law and medicine, where the applicability of one case to another is determined by the practitioner” (p. 211).

This does not mean, however, that the researcher does not have a responsibility regarding how their findings are understood and applied by the reader. It is precisely in order to help the reader in this task that Stake (1995) emphasizes the importance of including as much

detail as possible in regards to both data and narrative within one's research. This attention to detail, this *thick description*, creates a "vicarious experience" (p. 86) that gives the reader the information they need to decide to what extent the findings presented to them are transferrable to another case. Essentially, the more similar a situation is to that of the finding's case, the more likely those findings will be transferrable from one to the other (Johnson & Christensen, 2008)

As mentioned previously, the role of case study research therefore becomes not so much that of creating generalizations, but rather of helping the reader to modify and refine pre-existing ones. As Merriam (1998) explains, rather than leading to concrete, hard-and-fast conclusions, case study

. . . offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base. (p. 41)

3.3 Positionality and Preliminary Biases

Given how my personal and professional experience has motivated this thesis, as described in Chapter 1, I am very much aware that I have a preexisting bias in as much as these experiences have led me to believe that instructors are not assessing students in any structured way, relying on personal taste and imponderable criteria to guide their judgments. Furthermore, this assumption would seem to be supported by the fact that, in North America, the required degree for post-secondary teaching positions in studio instruction is the Masters in Fine Arts, meaning that candidates are generally not required to have taken any courses in education or pedagogy.

However, the existence of such a bias need not be necessarily a weakness. Corbin & Strauss (2008), for example, describe the goal of "objectivity" in qualitative research as a myth (p. 32); essentially, they argue that it is a practical impossibility for a researcher to eliminate bias from their work, as bias often stems from lived experience. As Kushins (2007) contends, to

approach biases as essentially negative is “restrictive”, because these “so-called biases explain what led me to conduct this study in the first place” (p. 58).

Rather than pretending that biases, and the experiences from which they stem, can be somehow ignored or otherwise made irrelevant, Corbin & Strauss (2008) suggest that it is more useful that they be acknowledged and used “to enhance the analytic process” (p. 85). Both personal and professional experience can actually be a strength for the qualitative researcher; they use the term “sensitivity” to describe the capacity such experiences can give researchers to better understand their subject through greater pre-existing insight (p. 33). Bogdan & Bicklen (2007) similarly explain that having an “intimate knowledge of the setting” allows researchers to better understand the effect that they may have on their subjects while generating additional insights (p. 35).

In their discussion concerning research validity and bias in qualitative research, Johnson & Christenson (2008) argue that the key to dealing with researcher bias is *reflexivity*, wherein the researcher “engages in critical self-reflection about his or her potential biases and predispositions” (p. 275). What is essential, therefore, is the acknowledgement on the researcher’s part of the biases they may hold, an understanding of where they stem from, and an awareness of the essential role self-reflection plays in the elaboration of one’s data analysis. It is in keeping with precisely this thinking that I chose to discuss this particular problem here, as it is one that I find both personally fascinating and relevant to my research.

My bias stems precisely from my knowledge of the field in which the present research is conducted, both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student, and I believe that that knowledge, as indicated by the above authors, adds to my research. I was able to experience a concrete example of this when I realized during the course of this study that my background in studio art actively served to lessen risks of observer effect. Though participants knew that I was conducting this research as an art education graduate researcher, the fact that I could discuss matters related to studio art and art history helped nurture a sense of congeniality and empathy between them and myself.

Furthermore, I approached this project from the point of view not only of a student, but of an instructor as well. Since my years as an undergraduate, I have gained experience teaching in both secondary and post-secondary education, though admittedly the latter was not in studio art but rather in art education. Importantly, it is precisely *as an instructor* that I wanted to better understand and clarify how studio instruction takes place. In this instance, I not only had the role of researcher, but also that of learner; as someone who was seeking to eventually be an instructor in the field, I believed that the present research would serve not only to clarify questions regarding assessment, but also to uncover potential best practices. Indeed, my own research procedure has an inbuilt element of *negative case sampling*, which Johnson & Christenson (2008) explain is a strategy wherein the researcher uses “examples that dis-confirm their expectations and explanations about what they are studying” (p. 276). In the present case I operated under the assumption that instructors who agreed to participate in this research did so in part because they felt confident that they themselves were effective assessors of their students’ work. I worked with the expectation that part of what would be revealed through this research would be a set of exemplars which would be of particular relevance to future post-secondary art instructors (including myself) and researchers in the field.

3.4 Sampling Decisions and Constraints

Once the project was approved by the university Ethics Review Board, the first phase involved the recruitment of participants for this study, which took the form of *chain* or *network sampling* as discussed by Merriam (2009). I began by asking my peers and past university instructors for the names of individuals who represented instances relevant to my topic – studio art instructors at public, post-secondary institutions – and who they believed would be interested and willing to take part in my research. In several cases, initial contacts immediately suggested further possible participants; such instances Merriam (2009) would describe as *snowball sampling* (p. 79).

Initially, I had considered adding more restrictive criteria, such as limiting my sampling to instructors with a certain teaching seniority or those teaching a particular medium. Upon

reflection, however, I decided that to do so would be to potentially limit the scope of my research by introducing limitations to my sampling for reasons not directly related to the subject at hand.

Although the number of participants in this study was mainly influenced by practical constraints such as the availability of willing instructors and the research timeline and funding, I was aware that this, too, was a potentially problematic issue. Put simply: how many cases should one include in a multiple case study? Creswell (2007) states that the typical number used is four or five, lest a greater number result in a lack of depth in the findings (p. 76). This reasoning, however, is based on practicality (the amount of time a study will take) rather than any concrete theory. Yin (2003), on the other hand, considers that the number of cases should be based on the researcher's perceived complexity of the situation; the more external conditions exist that may influence the study results, the more cases should be included (p. 51). However, the fact that the level of complexity is based on the researcher's *perceptions* of the situation reveals the potential arbitrariness of such a decision. Ultimately, the final decision is a matter of discretion and judgement (Yin, 2003, p. 51) and it is up to the individual researcher to decide for themselves what number of cases they feel comfortable using (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 409).

A previous iteration of the present research which I attempted during my Master's degree in art education, and who's planned timeline was therefore much shorter, had to be abandoned due to the difficulty in assembling a minimal number of participants, who needed not only to be willing to be interviewed, but also allow the researcher to observe a class critique. The latter was cited by several potential candidates as the principal reason for declining to participate.

I was therefore pleased and heartened when, out of the over seventy instructors from eight post-secondary studio art departments which I contacted (Appendix A), I received twenty-one responses, leading to a final total of fifteen participants from six separate institutions. Schedule constraints precluded critique observations for five of the fifteen participants.

Informed written consent was obtained from the participants before data collection (Appendix B) and confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the masking of any details that might reveal the educational institutions involved.

3.5 Profile of Participants

In total, I interviewed fifteen studio art instructors from six North American post-secondary educational institutions situated in or near large urban centers. Two of these institutions specialized in studio art and design education, whilst the remaining four were large and mid-size teaching and research universities.

Participants consisted of eight women and seven men whose length of teaching experiences varied from seven to forty-one years. As of the dates of the respective interviews which took place between October 2013 and April 2014, four participants had been teaching for less than a decade, four had been teaching for between 10 and 20 years, four for between 20 and 30 years, and the remaining three had over three decades of teaching experience (Table 1).

The participant instructors had personal artistic practices that covered a variety of principally visual media as summarized in Table 2.

Table 1: Participant Overview

| Participant | Discipline | Teaching Experience (years) | Post-Secondary Art Training | Post-secondary Educational Training |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| P1 | painting | 26 | Diploma | None |
| P2 | painting | 32 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P3 | 3-d instillation | 3 | MFA | Ed. B.A. |
| P4 | sculpture | 13 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P5 | multi media | 7 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P6 | painting | 40 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P7 | photography | 7 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P8 | multi-media | 25+ | BFA, MFA | Summer Diploma |
| P9 | drawing/painting | 24 | MFA | None |
| P10 | sculpture | 41 | BFA, MFA | Art ed. Phd |
| P11 | painting | 16 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P12 | painting | 25+ | BFA, MFA | None |
| P13 | multi-media | 19 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P14 | multi-media | 17 | BFA, MFA | None |
| P15 | painting | 7 | MFA | None |

Table 2: Disciplinary Representation of this study

| Discipline (self-identified) | Number of Participants |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| painting | 6 |
| sculpture | 2 |
| multi-media | 4 |
| drawing | 1 |
| photography | 1 |
| 3-D instillation | 1 |
| Total | 15 |

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Overview. Unlike most other forms of qualitative research, case study insists on the use of multiple sources of data including interviews, observations, artefacts and documents. This approach results in a greater level of validity in the findings than might be reached through the use of only one or two data sources and helps to avoid the possible drawbacks inherent in certain forms of data collection.

As an example, Orr (2007) discusses how interview-based studies tend to reveal interviewees *perceptions* rather than their actual practice. In her own research on instructor assessment, Orr (2011) chose to lessen the impact of this problem by asking participants to talk to themselves out loud whilst assessing student work. As the author notes, however, this approach is not without its problems, as the process of verbalizing one's thoughts, even if whilst alone, may well impact sub-conscious and tacit decision making.

Given such drawbacks, I chose instead to use a triangulated approach consisting of interviews, document analysis and observations in order to create a convergence of findings that go beyond the stated intentions of instructors, and serves to add both depth and breadth to the research by revealing the interaction between theory and practice within the domain of the critique (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Stake, 1995).

3.6.2 Interviews. Having provided interview questions to the participants ahead of time in order to ensure that they could prepare their answers if they so wished, I began by conducting preliminary guided participant interviews as discussed by Johnson and Christenson (2008), which were audio recorded and later transcribed. The interviews were informed by Barrett's (2000) research that used open-ended questions to survey instructors about their methods of student assessment and experiences of critiques (Appendix D). The choice of open-ended questions was made specifically so as to allow the interview to be as conversational as possible, thus putting the participants at ease and eliciting more in depth information than might be gathered from a more formal, structured interview format.

Questions were organized under the general rubrics of: *arts background and beliefs*, *professional teaching history*, *teaching philosophy*, *assessment*, and *critiques*. The first three categories included questions to gain background information regarding participants' artistic careers, teacher training, educational philosophies and attitudes towards student assessment in general. Although overlapping, questions regarding critiques were separated from those regarding assessment due to the importance of the critique and its status as a signature pedagogy within studio art instruction.⁷

3.6.3 Document analysis and observations. For a number of practical reasons, I was only able to conduct studio critique observations of ten out of the fifteen participants. Course outlines were also requested, but only five participants chose to forward them to me.

⁷ The status of signature pedagogy of the critique is further discussed in Chapter 2.

I then conducted observations of class studio critiques associated with courses taught by the participant/instructors, as these are considered the signature pedagogical tool of studio teaching as well as assessment. Only hand written notes were taken during these observations: no audio or video recording devices were used.

I chose to take the approach of *participant-as-observer*, as described by Johnson and Christenson (2008), for the following reasons. As Wolcott (2008) discusses, the very presence of an observer inevitably changes the dynamic of the situation being observed, and any claim to true objectivity is therefore nonsensical. The question then is how this observer effect can be minimized.

In order to do so, I therefore asked the participant instructor before the observation was to take place if they had a preference regarding the extent, or lack thereof, of my involvement in the critique. My goal was to ensure that they were as comfortable as possible with my presence in the classroom, whilst deferring to their knowledge of the dynamic of the particular group of students involved. In doing so, I was also able to use my previous experiences in order to effectively participate in the process of the critique being observed to whatever extent would allow me to “blend in” to the proceedings. As someone who has had experiences as a university studio art student, an art instructor, and a professional artist, I have an insider's knowledge of how critiques take place. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that having what they refer to as “an intimate knowledge of the setting” is an effective way of minimizing the problem of observer effect (p. 39). In addition, such knowledge brings with it an important element of theoretical sensitivity, which Corbin and Strauss (2008) state can help generate potentially relevant concepts within research.

Furthermore, my interactions with students were limited to those which took place during the critiques, and no formal interviews with students were conducted. My rationale for this decision was that the role of the student and that of the instructor within the practice of assessment are completely dissimilar. Students experience assessment solely as a phenomenon, whereas instructors are instrumental to it; as my goal was to learn about methods of assessing students and their artwork as opposed to the students' assessment of the

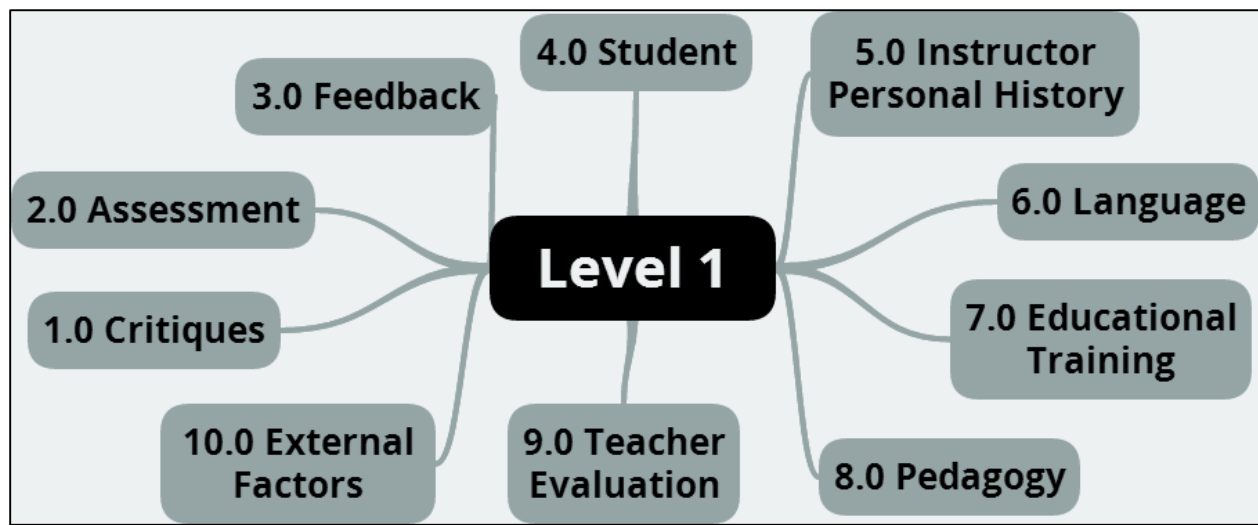
instructor and their course, it was therefore unnecessary for me to include student interviews in this research. From a purely practical standpoint, I believe that this decision also increased the likelihood of instructor participation, as prospective participants would most likely be reticent to collaborate if they believed that their students' personal views concerning their teaching methods were to be included in the research. That being said, informed written consent was also obtained from the students present at the critiques being observed (Appendix C) so that I could make notes of any relevant data stemming from interactions between instructors and students or between the students themselves. Once again, confidentiality was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and the masking of any details that might reveal the educational institutions involved.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data consisting of the transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed using a constant comparative approach, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and originally formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Although the above method of analysis is generally ascribed to Grounded Theory, it is important to emphasize that due to the nature of this particular research project, with its pre-planned, sequential data collection, pre-study literature review and pre-conceived research questions, it cannot be considered to be Grounded Theory research as such. The erroneous description for precisely this reason of much research claiming to be Grounded Theory has been insisted upon by Glaser (Glaser & Holton, 2004), one of the methodologies founders.

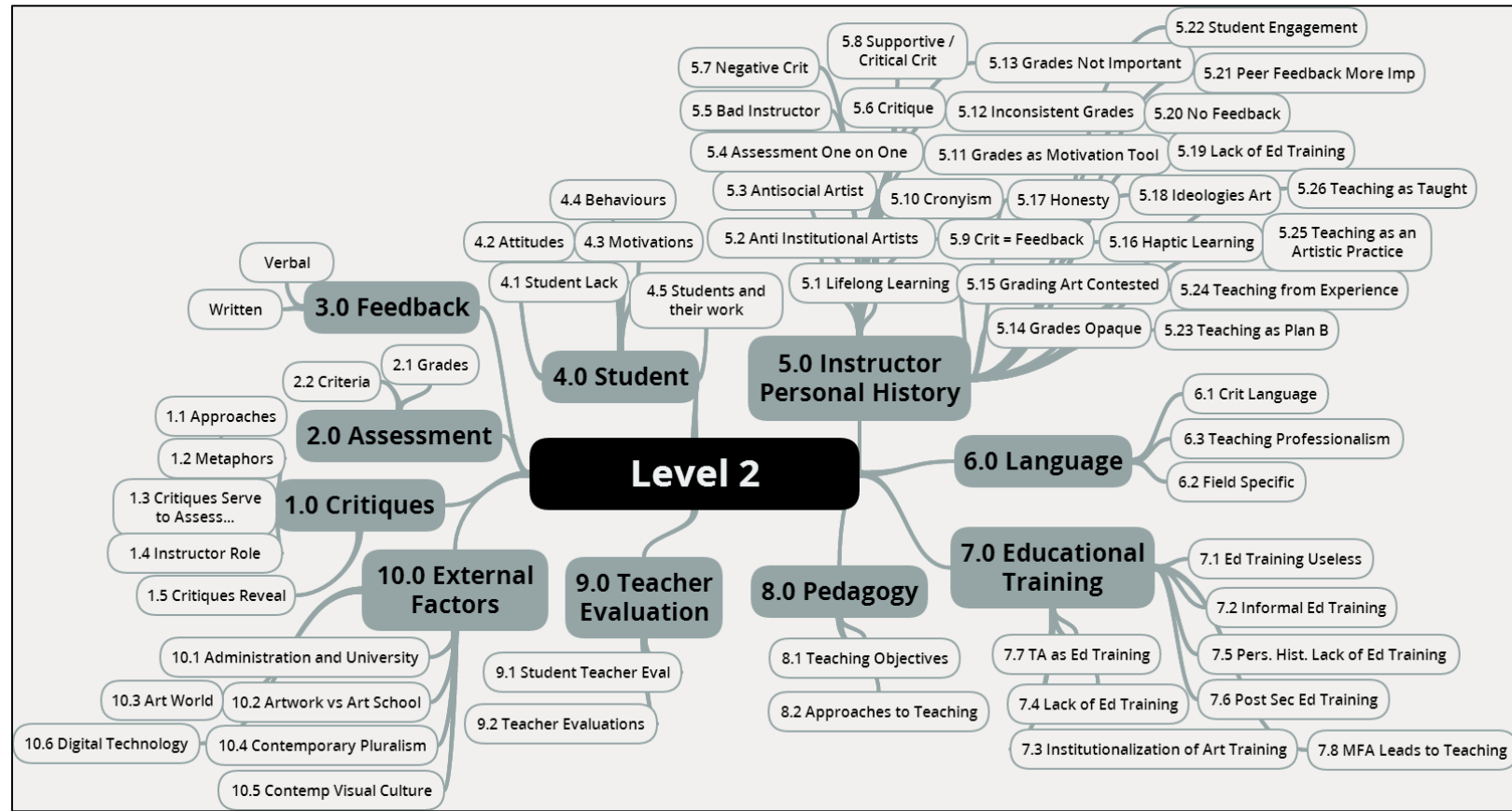
However, both Lichtman (2006) and Merriam (2009) agree that the well-documented, systematic and structured nature of the constant comparative approach to analysis make it an effective and popular tool for qualitative researchers from a variety of methodological backgrounds. In her seminal book on case study research *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*, Merriam (1998) argues that the basic strategies involved "are compatible with the inductive, concept-building of all qualitative research" (p. 159).

Approximately 200 pages of interview transcripts were initially coded, resulting in over 650 individual codes. A first sifting of codes irrelevant to the subject of this research brought the number down to just below 450. After further elimination and agglomeration, I eventually was able to create ten overarching categories (Figure 1) which incorporated 60 principal sub-code categories (Figure 2)

Figure 1: Level 1 Code Categories

Field notes taken during the critique observation sessions were then examined in order to find further data that could be linked to the interview codes, as well as to compare and contrast the interview data with what had been observed. Finally, as it was only possible to obtain course outlines for only one third of the participants, these were principally examined in order to ascertain intended learning outcomes.

Figure 2: Level 2 Sub-Code Categories



Chapter 4: Data Analysis – Interviews

In this chapter, I discuss the data stemming from guided interviews conducted with research participants. These interviews consisted of open-ended questions to survey post-secondary studio art instructors about their educational backgrounds and personal teaching histories, as well as their methods, experiences and beliefs concerning student assessment.

The chapter begins with data from the first two groups of interview questions (Q1 to Q7 in Appendix D) which focus on participant's pedagogical and artistic training and careers. I then move on to examine their answers to two specific questions which are stand-alone in as much as they relate only tangentially to the subject-matter of this research, yet recur throughout the interviews in general.

These questions are:

Question 10: What are the most pressing issues and concerns you have encountered in teaching?

Question 11: What do you think students should learn in [selected medium] courses?

Finally, I focus on the data from their responses to Questions 13 to 28, which deal with participants' assessment practices. This is the first of two groups of questions which make up the principal subject matter of this research. The second group (Q29 to Q37) specifically covers the subject of studio critiques, and is discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Participants' Formal Training in Art

As shown in Table 1 (p. 44), participants' artistic credentials were almost universally similar, as all but two held a Master's degrees in studio art. This is to be expected, given that on the one hand post-secondary institutions offering studio art based courses currently list the

MFA as the principal requirement for instructors, and on the other, Post Graduate degrees in studio art are a relatively new addition to academia; historian James Elkins states that the earliest such degrees were awarded at the very end of the last century, and have only begun to be offered more widely in the last ten years (Elkins, 2014).

Though a few participants had positive memories of their education associated with specific studio art instructors with whom they built a personal rapport (P7,14,68; P6,14,60), many more expressed negative opinions as far as the actual teaching they received was concerned. P13 described his instructors as “poor professors [who] didn’t know how to teach”(P13,5,15) and P8 simply stated that she hadn’t had “any good art teachers”(P8,14,92).

P6, who has been teaching for four decades, described his professors as “a bit vacant and unsure” (P6,14,59). However, he also acknowledged that this was in no small part because of the particular historical context of the time.

[In the] early seventies, when I did my undergrad . . . , there was a sense that the old way kind of didn't work anymore, but not too many people knew what the new way was. So there were some schools [where] it became a kind of do-it-yourself situation where the teacher wasn't a teacher, was just kind of a comrade in the struggle . . . was kind of like . . . more, there was this kind of radicalization of art schools.

But most art schools didn't get radicalized, but there was still a question that something was wrong with the old way. So I think a lot of schools did what my school did; they didn't know what to do. My teachers were clearly confused.

I had a teacher in my first year who disappeared. Who we never saw. I mean, almost never saw, and we just sort of taught ourselves, tried to figure out what to do. He'd come in occasionally and we'd start on something, then he'd disappear so it was very weird. (P6,14,57)

P2 described that his instructors ranged from “really giving [on the one hand], to other people who just hid in their offices”. One of his strongest memories, however, was of one particular instructor.

[He] didn't know who was in his class and fancied himself a rebel. So he just came in at the end and announced that we all had a pass; and here I am doing my work and he doesn't even know who the fuck I am. (P2,14,67)

More generally, several participants complained about the lack of critical feedback they received as students (P8,14,92; P5,14,64; P3,14,39).

At first that was fabulous, but then it became predictable and so basically it was on my own shoulders to make any kind of critique or move forward. There was no help. And that was quite annoying. I mean I was very aware of both the pleasure of that, because I felt a certain amount of confidence, but there was another part of me that really wished there was more exchange about the work. (P10,14,50)

For P8, who entered post-secondary art education later in life, the reason for this was quite specific:

[They] really reserved judgement. Didn't push me. I think it's because it was a really specific situation. . . . Because I was a "mature" student, with a child. And I think they didn't take me seriously. And I couldn't convey that I was serious. So somehow there was difficult communication. (P8,14,98)

Finally, the issue of grading was also revealed as problematic. In answer to the question "What do you remember about the way your instructors went about assessing students and their work?"(Q14), participants variously described the process as "inexistent" (P3,14,39), "not very clear" (P13,14,45), a "mystery" (P5,14,61) and generally "opaque" (P15,14,217; P12,14,50). P4 described his experience as a seemingly "magical process" where the grade was assigned "based on whatever" (P4,14,67).

Remaining participants (P11, P2, P9, P1 and P14) had little to no recollection of how they'd been assessed, but instead tended to remember the critiques they took part in.

4.2 Participants' Formal Training in Education

The question "Have you had any training in education?" (Q5) was met with a variety of reactions, including annoyance (P12), embarrassment (P5, P1, P8) and laughter (P7, P4, P11).

In terms of post-secondary training in education, the majority of participants had no educational training to speak of. Again, this is not surprising given that the MFA is generally the principal requirement for post-secondary studio art teaching positions. Of the four who did have some such training, three had little good to say of their experiences. P8 participated in a summer teaching course of which she remembered little other than it was "fun" but "kind of silly" (P8,5,13). P3 could only describe her BA in education as "boring" (P3,15,41), and claimed that her teaching was based on her own intuition rather than any training she may have gotten (P3,15,42). Similarly, P10 dismissed her Phd in art education as being primarily theoretical and therefore not having had any relevance to her teaching practice (P10,5,24).

Only one participant, P15, mentioned his formal education training as having been useful, though as an undergraduate student he eventually abandoned art education in favour of a Bachelor's degree in art and psychology. However, P15 did credit the classroom observations which were part of the art education courses as being a very important to his understanding of how he himself wanted to teach (P15,5,94).

4.3 Participants' Informal Training in Education

Of those with no formal educational training, more than half discussed the notion that they had learned to teach from, or in response to, how they themselves had been taught: whether it was a matter of, as P1 put it, "drawing upon the *best* teaching I had" (P1,5,15), or at the other end of the spectrum, "giving the students what I would have liked to get" (P3 15,43). This would seem to corresponding to findings by Caroll (2006), who suggests that teachers frequently defer to their own educational experiences when it comes to developing their teaching strategies.

Four participants specifically mentioned their experiences as teaching assistants during their graduate studies as having allowed them to work closely with instructors and thus gain a certain amount of teaching skills (P5,5,23; P9,15,48; P13,15,53; P7,5,24). However, certain comments revealed potential problems associated with such informal forms of teacher training, precisely because they may not be viewed as such by students, instructors or administration.

As an example, P4 explained that, as T.A. positions at his institution are not formally considered to be for the purpose of teacher training, T.A.s are often not included in the process of grading student work, despite the key role grading plays in a teacher's responsibilities.

Although participants were not asked if teaching had been part of their educational goals from the outset, it is interesting to note that the majority began to teach during or immediately after receiving their degrees. P13 was the only participant to directly state that he initially had had no plan to go into teaching. Laughing, he described that when he was offered a T.A. position, "I thought it was a punishment", as he hadn't enrolled in graduate school to become a teacher (P13,15,53).

P15, on the other hand, had been looking to do just that, and studied in an institution that placed specific attention on the potential future teaching practices of their students.

[We] did have one semester course where we did talk about teaching, and . . . there was a system in place where we would shadow professors in our first year and observe them teaching, and in our second year we had the opportunity to teach a course as "instructor of record". Once again, observing the professors and seeing how they did what they did, and having some discussions of pedagogy and teaching at the graduate level, but not much. (P15,5,97)

Problematically, however, there was once again conflict concerning the end goal of graduates' studies in studio art, as the same institution which seemed to be preparing its graduate students to teach, also claimed that their objective was to train them as artists.

[They] really wanted to emphasize to the graduate students that they're philosophy was orienting you to being an artist. They acknowledged that the terminal degree would

allow you to teach but they didn't want it to be the forefront reason, even though most of us were coming there to get that paper to teach! [laughs]. (P15,5,95)

P7, on the other hand, openly questioned whether graduate studies had been the best approach to take in order to further his artistic career:

In terms of teaching, the degree helps, and that certainly put me in this chair today. But for the rest of it, I think maybe if I would have spent that time doing residencies and promoting myself in other ways, perhaps my artistic career would be more developed at an international level than it is. (P7,7,38)

These comments lead to the question of what the role of post-secondary art education actually is. Are departments meant to be forming the next generation of artists, post-secondary art instructors, or both? Most importantly, are the various stake-holders in the process (namely students, instructors and administrators) in agreement about the answer to this question?

Further comments would indicate that lack of teacher training is not always remedied upon entering the workplace. P1 and P5 referred to specific teaching workshops offered to faculty at their institutions (P1,16,66). P1 and P14 (P14,16,85), who were both department chairs at the time of the interviews, also discussed the attention that they personally gave to new staff.

Others, however, expressed a lack of orientation for new instructors in their departments. P7 described having to rely on peers for advice (P7,5,28), while P9 spoke of it being a matter of simply "learning as you go" (P9,15,46) and P10 described learning to teach by "trial and error" (P10,5,26). P4 pragmatically explained:

It's kind of a sink or swim; you kind of figure it out. (P4,5,16)

When I started teaching we had no..there's no support. It's just "here you go, here's your class, learn to teach it."

[Laughs]

Oddly enough, even with a tenure stream job here, . . . there was no “welcome to this university, this is how we mark, or do things”. It was just: “go teach that course.”
(P4,15,73)

Only P2 expressed having had no issues whatsoever transitioning to the role of teacher:

So I was showing and doing that end of things [as an artist], and I knew all these people here. They actually approached me about teaching, so I was courted, if you will. . . . So that’s how I came into education. So I guess they assumed that I was able to work that way. . . . So I had no difficulty making the transition, and essentially it’s because I work on my work a lot so I have a lot to say about objective subjects. So I didn’t have any development of approach at all . . . none of them did, I don’t think. (P2,5,20)

4.4 Pressing issues encountered in teaching (Question 11)

Several key themes were seen to dominate responses to question number eleven, “What are the most pressing issues and concerns you have encountered in teaching?”

4.4.1 Lack of time and space. One practical issue mentioned by three of the participants (P1, P3 and P8), was related to a lack of both time and space. According to these instructors, larger class sizes, limited studio space and shorter contact hours meant that students were reaching the fourth year of their undergraduate programme without the skills to work at that level.

I have students at the fourth year class who aren’t ready to work independently and develop. They’re not ready to deal with that. . . . They don’t have the making skills, they don’t have the conceptual or historical background. (P3,11,31)

4.4.2 Student secondary school education. The low level of student skills when they enter post-secondary programs was an overarching concern and source of frustration, whether in terms of writing (P4), critical thinking (P4, P14), communication (P14), knowledge of social and cultural history (P9), or technical skills (P4, P10 and P1). P4 placed the blame for this squarely on the shoulders of secondary education.

Most recently I'd say the most pressing concerns is the failure of our high school education system; the fact that we're getting students in now who don't know how to write an essay yet they were being A students when they were in high school.

We're getting students who've never held a hammer. There are no shop classes anymore; art classes are very much about making drawings based on clippings from the internet or magazines. They're drawing from a picture as opposed to drawing from reality. I find the skills that students have over the last five years have significantly dropped, and a lot of that is the failure of the high school education system. (P4,11,40)

The paucity of technical skills was also seen as a direct result of the increased role of digital media in modern culture (P8, P10 and P1).

But there's that appreciation of making, and thinking through making, [that's disappearing] because speaking of technology, that physical interface that we have with this world is being eroded and so [pause] it's a bit foreign. . . . I had a student who told me she'd never made anything that was off the computer: "everything I've made was in the computer; through the computer." I asked: "you've never even screwed a handlebar to a bicycle?" She said "No."

So it was kind of telling. "I don't know how to use anything, I've never used a hammer. Nothing like that." (P10,11,41)

Another source of concern was a tendency amongst students to being risk-averse and hesitant to experiment (P8, P9, P15 and P14). This fear of failure was leading to what one participant described as a form of "paralysis":

When a student says “I don’t know what to do; I don’t have any ideas.” I’m just so... I don’t know how to [pause] I mean [pause] how can that be? (P9,22,83)

Here again, blame was partially placed on the doorstep of secondary school education.

[Students] come into college but they still have basically grown up in a system where they’ve been given a question and they’re given four possible answers and three of them are wrong. So . . . they are not aggressive risk takers. And why would they be; we’ve trained it right out of them from the beginning. (P14,11,43)

One thing that is consistent is that [high school] does not prioritize a lot of experimentation, and failure as a kind of pedagogical success. It’s like: add up the equation, get the answer, give it to the teacher and get some kind of reward. (P15,0,18)

4.4.3 Student attitudes and motivations. Issues related to students’ general mindsets and personal motivations surfaced not only within answers to Q11 specifically, but also throughout the length of the interviews.

P8, P1 and P11 were particularly concerned with a lack of student engagement in their field.

The kind of [question]: “Why are you at an art school when you’re not interested in art?” That sort of thing. “Why don’t you go to galleries?” “Are their artists you’re interested in?”, and they answer “Uh, no.”

So that kind of general malaise. I’m not saying it’s every student, there are some amazing students, but [pause] it’s just [pause] it’s sometimes surprising how students can get to art school and then [pause] not seem to care about art. (P11,11,27)

P6 held a similar view, speaking of a lack of student investment in their work. This could be as practical a matter as not being willing to put the time and effort into projects or a much

broader question of how seriously they seemed to take the work they produced. Once a again, a modern social theme emerges; in this case, that of contemporary pluralism

Because I think that's one of the problems right now, with the web, and internet and [pause] "Oh, I saw this, and that was really neat. Oh my god check that out", and then never really . . . hold on to something long enough to develop it.

That's one of the problems with pluralism; a sense that people get bored or run out of steam after a certain amount of time. (P6,10,35)

Educated in the early 1970s, P6 also expressed uncertainty as to whether students were living in a time where it was even possible for them to adopt a strong sense of artistic motivation.

[There] was a period when people were just a bit more passionate about the language that was being introduced and, you know, their work. And it was a real statement to be working [a certain] way.

I think that so much has been opened, so many doors have been opened, that some people aren't even sure [pause] which door [pause] or the worthiness of the different doors [pause] you know what I mean. But that could just be me, kind of. [laughs]
(P6,10,37)

[And] what they should also learn is that at a certain point - better sooner than later - you need to learn to take a stand. . . . You know, when there was that dominance, people would say "well fuck you; abstraction rules!" And I'm not saying that was healthy, but that was interesting that someone would say that. And then you [pause] if you disagreed with that, would have to say "well wait a minute, hang on, are you rejecting anything prior to [whatever]."

And so, that I think is an exciting and important part of being an artist and getting involved in aesthetics is realizing it's not life and death, but it is important, the decisions you make [pause] and it's like [pause] they have a moral character to them, that if

you're determined to work a certain way there's a moral character to that and then you should be ready, willing, and able to discuss it and to argue it and to engage in it. That's sometimes what I find lacking, I have to say right now. (P6 10,36-37)

P10 also described the problem as a generational one: a widespread student mindset that was essentially antipodal in relation to the making of works of art that exist in three-dimensional space. A multi-faceted issue encapsulating a number of contemporary social themes, it is worth reproducing P10's words at length.

Something that is a more recent concern is the impatience of students in slowing down and committing time that's needed within sculpture. Because it can be very time consuming. And it needs that kind of commitment. . . . To spend days sanding a piece of wood or something seems like an absurd process.

. . . But there's that appreciation of making and thinking through making that is both the beauty of sculpture, because speaking of technology, that physical interface that we have with this world is being eroded and so [pause] it's a bit foreign. But you can teach so much to someone who's practicing it.

[Furthermore], it costs a lot of money. So experimentation is more likely to be with stuff they buy at the Salvation Army. So thinking about the accessibility of it, the economics of it, the time relationships, all of those are very much in the forefront of people's thinking.

. . . And also ideas of environmentalism; here in ----- students are very conscious of waste and the notion of buying lumber which costs a lot of money and making something and then disposing of it because there's no space, is harsh. Not just for the pocket book, but also because they're thinking about its usefulness and its place in the world. So you have to convince students about the usefulness of the activity of art and the existence of art and where that stands in the social/political and cultural spheres.

Like if you say that this is wasteful in terms of money and environmentally, it's problematic in terms of longevity, and how are you going to tell your friend years from

now what you did, and how do you get it into a gallery, or how do you sell it So these are practical things that make it difficult for students to commit to a kind of object based investigation. (P10,11,40-43)

4.4.4 Curriculum issues. Finally, several issues related to curricular planning also emerged. P14, P6 and P2 were concerned that there was a fundamental lack of overall curricular structure within studio art programs.

P6 described how a single course was often divided into multiple sections, each of which was taught by a different instructor. However, with no common syllabus to guide them, there was no way of knowing if students who were ostensibly taking the same course were actually learning similar subject matter (P6,11,41). Furthermore, he explains, the tendency within academia to favour postmodern pluralism means that students end up lacking any common foundations on which to build upon.

I find the students really lack some fundamental foundation on which to set some of the ideas that are inevitably going to be set at their doorstep during their art school education.

[They] get their choices of art history courses, and they're not obliged to take a survey course so they can know a lot about [pause] I don't know [pause] Inuit video. And I'm serious about that, and I'm not putting down Inuit video. . . . These sorts of things and the social political tone of them are good for them and great and useful for them to study, but for me they're the kinds of things that they can study in grad school. . . .

Whether you like the "bearded old men" or not, to know that notions like the Romantic, the Baroque, Classical, Proto-Renaissance, Renaissance, Analytic Cubism, Synthetic Cubism. Now maybe I'm silly to think that these are important, but I [pause] I [pause] I [pause] regret that sometimes that in a class of twenty students and you're talking in broad terms, which I tend to do in a studio class, there aren't two people who will have the same background. (P6,11,42)

P14 judged the problem as one that existed at a program-wide level. In his view, it was essential that each year of courses should be seen to reinforce and build upon its predecessors; however, this simply was often not the case. Lack of communication between faculty members was, in his consideration, the root of many of the most important curricular problems; a theme also brought up in other interviews. In order to have a structured, coherent curriculum, he explained, “[you] have to know what your colleagues are doing. And that’s where some of the biggest problems are in schools” (P14,11,48).

Yet P3 was only one amongst many to bemoan an almost complete lack of discussion amongst faculty regarding pedagogical and curricular issues, describing her colleagues as often “territorial” (P3,16,47). P6 explained simply that “unless something goes really haywire, people just don’t know what goes on in the other classrooms” (P6,16,69).

Only one participant, P12, made a point to actively praise her colleagues for their positive interaction and cooperation.

I don’t know. I couldn’t ask for better colleagues. I want to rip of their faces at crit sometimes, and I know they feel the same about me too, and that’s good for the students because it’s not about who these people are; there’s something serious at stake in the work and in the ideas and in the philosophies. (P12,16,68)

P2, a landscape painter specializing in the teaching of objective drawing and painting, deplored the erosion of the instruction of what he considered to be basic art making skills. With over thirty years of teaching experience, he described this as a gradual process that had taken place throughout the Western world and over so many years that the problem had now become, in his words, “generational”.

A certain ratio of students expect to have an education in the basics, and they don’t get it. And their instructors don’t have it. The ones who are coming here now currently in the university. Look at this shit in the halls. It’s unbelievable! I mean, who’s teaching this? To me, it’s like, wait a minute, you can go three generations and now you have

nobody who even knows how to teach it. And you don't learn how to teach this from a book. (P2,11,52)

Importantly, he emphasized that this was a simple matter of one aesthetic ideology gaining dominance over its predecessor, but rather the disappearance of an entire range of skills.

Because it shouldn't be gone. You should have a choice. It's not either/or. You should have free choice in education. It's absent. (P2,11,50)

I can draw and paint. Everybody should have a chance to be educated properly if they want to. It's like saying brain surgery [pause] whatever, it's a stupid analogy. That idea that you need to have fine, fine skills and focused attention to get to the point where somebody to trust you to do something. And you basically now have people who can sit around and talk about it and are quite willing to operate on your brain [pause] It's terrible! It's terrible, the stuff down there [in the corridor outside]! Who presents themselves to teach this? (P2,11,52)

4.5 General Learning Outcomes (Question 10)

4.5.1 Technical skills. Almost all the participants agreed that the first and most essential thing students needed to learn in their classes was technical skill: how to use particular materials, tools, and “an awareness of all the possibilities of [their] medium” (P11,10,25). P7, P15, and P4 explained that once the basics of technical skill were grasped, they could then be coupled with experimentation in order to eventually be used to effectively articulate conceptual ideas.

P1 emphasized that the teaching and learning of technical skills had a role to play throughout the undergraduate degree, and should never be completely ignored in favour of the

elaboration of theory and concept. This was expressed repeatedly using the metaphor of music and the essential role of repetition in learning how to play an instrument.

Obviously students need lots of skill based delivery in first and second year. And third year you're pushing concept. But I think painting is like playing an instrument, and you keep getting better and better [as you work at it] so I think those formal structures still can be nudged and nuanced, given breadth, stretched at every level. (P1,10,26)

[That] might be from that musical background, learning piano or learning violin, you learn how to hold that instrument, and it's always being corrected, and there are better ways, and trying to relax, and trying to get that whole harmony, and that kinetic [pause] working. And that does not happen in a year. That takes years and years and years of listening and fine tuning, and I think that for me teaching is fine tuning that. I don't believe students can do two years, and then they do all concept and then they're great painters and we let them. (P1,13,45)

Interestingly, part of P4's explanation regarding the importance of technical skills was medium specific; unlike painting, for example, a student who was not technically proficient in using the tools of the trade could be seriously hurt, or hurt someone else.

It's a dangerous environment; we're taking a bunch of eighteen or twenty year olds with raging hormones and giving them open flames and moving saw blades and shit they could really do some damage with. So really need to be on the ball because if we're really assessing them and graduating them to the next level, I really need to know that they know how to use a band saw properly so they don't hurt themselves.

That's not an issue in painting because . . . if you don't learn the colour wheel in one class and go to the next class, you just fail the class. You'll not get seriously injured. Whereas in sculpture, if you don't know how to properly use a table saw, then somebody is going to get hurt. (P4,35,172)

4.5.2 Professionalism. Most participants also expressed the importance of students being taught various skills that would feed into their professionalization as artists. Some of these were practical, such as how to write an artist statement or proposal, or how to express and navigate criticism in a productive fashion – what P14 described as having “critical distance”.

They should learn how to behave properly, the right language to use, how to critique, how to talk about work. (P4,10,34)

Critique, how to communicate an idea, how to criticize others without attacking, how to take critique without taking offence. And when someone is being critical of you in a mean spirited way, how to take that with [pause] how to get that critical distance. (P14,10,36)

Several participants (P13, P1, P9, P5 and P15) also emphasized the importance of students developing intellectual skills that would allow them to perpetuate their artistic practice. Critical thinking, self-reflection and self-motivation were seen as key to encouraging a capacity to engage in lifelong learning.

And also how to perpetuate studio practice is also pretty strong subtext to all of these courses; we’re training them how to make good work but also how to [pause] What to do when they stop making work. How to keep making work. How to follow their ideas. How to make things that are interesting but also how to maintain interest in the world. How to build a body of work. That’s pretty nebulous, but if we can teach students that, then they have survival skills that will perpetuate themselves. We’re teaching them how to be curious. How to maintain curiosity. (P13,10,29-30)

P15 in particular was adamant that many, if not most, of the above skills were transferrable beyond the field of art.

[By] the time a student leaves here, leaves me, leaves us, she’s probably gained many skills that she’s not even aware of. They might have woodworking skills that translate into other types of fabrication and jobs that might not just be [in] the art world. So I

think it's part of us to recognize that things that they've done and they've gained outside of the actual art-making are valid. Even critical skills.

To have those skills - how to observe, analyze, synthesize and interpret, working to be objective when necessary, or at least understanding when you're shifting gears between reporter, whistle blower, activist, and what your position is as the critical agent - those are valuable skills that go beyond any making of things, but also support the making of things. (P15,10,135-138)

Furthermore, these ways of working and thinking, what P15 refers to as "behaviours of inquiry", served to promote a specific end goal.

Everything I do, whether it's incremental or technical, or philosophical discussions at upper levels, is helping to guide the student towards autonomy. My job is best achieved is when you don't need me anymore except for a letter of recommendation. So even at this level, I hope that when they've left here I hope they have the basics, the foundation to be critical and build on their experiences to get smarter, better, stronger, faster. Whatever it is. (P15,0,26)

P12 similarly articulated the transferrable nature of skills taught in studio art, but expressed frustration at having to defend this belief to administrators.

[University] administrations . . . often talk about creative and critical thinking skills, [but we constantly have] to convince them that that is in fact what we teach and that we are capable of instrumentalizing it for students in other programs. (P12,11,33)

4.5.2.1 Student career prospects. Despite talk of professionalization, there was uncertainty expressed amongst some participants as to the nature of students' career prospects after graduation. As mentioned previously (section 3.1.3), P7 acknowledged that his studio art degree had helped him establish himself as an educator, but questioned whether it had been the best approach to take in order to further his artistic career (P7,7,38).

The brutal fact is that the majority of students at this level are not going to become professional artists, and even most of them won't work in a professional arts context. It's the slim minority. I look at the undergrad students that were my peers at the undergrad level; some of them are working at restaurants, some of them have their own businesses, some of them have gone on to teach art in elementary settings or at the local art gallery. It's very few that have gone on to be practicing artists, curators, critics, academics. So I wonder. (P7,33,180)

P6 emphasized the importance of self-motivation in order to continue making art after graduation. He added, however, that this did not necessarily mean that a career would follow.

P6: You don't work, then nothing happens. Work; you just gotta put in the hours. Close your facebook account, just like, do it.

SF: And hope it amounts to something!

P6: [laughs] You don't even [pause] you just work. I mean, work always amounts to something; whether it amounts to a career [pause] well, that's [pause] that's really [pause] that's something else. [laughs] (P6,13,50-52)

P4 was the only participant to dismiss the question of employment prospects as irrelevant, stating that the primary role of the university was to form "critical, engaged citizens". He bemoaned the fact that students "think they're coming here because they're going to get some kind of job", a notion that he describes as a "mythology" (P4,11,44-45).

I tell my students in their first year, when I teach the theory class the first question I get is "What job am I gonna get?". And my answer is there's only one job, and I have it. So they'll have to wait 'til I die or I retire! [laughs] (P4, 41,176)

To finish on a somewhat more hopeful note (at least for any student happening to read this!), though P15 acknowledged that a professional career as an artist might not be the result of acquiring one's degree, he believed that it served an important purpose for culture as a whole.

There are so many people who graduate with an undergrad degree in some type of art, and . . . who graduate with a master's degree in art, and all those people aren't going on to become artists, but they're going out to affect the world and influence people, and teach and change other people's perceptions, and maybe those people who are being touched are living more creative lives. (P15,11,148)

4.5.3 Historical and contemporary context. Finally, it was emphasized (by P8, P6, P12, P15 and P3) that students should gain an awareness and understanding of contemporary issues and discourses, as well as the wider history of art. Such knowledge serves to feed their own artistic practices, as well as helps them to consider where their work fits into the overall "continuum" of art history (P6,3,7).

I think they should learn how to understand their own process and to think critically about what they do in relation to art historical context and contemporary context. So that there is a context from which they work. That's really important. (P3,10,29)

I want them to see the potential of different approaches to painting [and] be open enough to see the potential of these different languages. So that's the balancing act; to set up projects, for example this project that showed them an old master technique, [and how it] could be applied to, you know, a painting of your boyfriend, or, you know, a painting of a self-portrait in some sexy outfit, or whatever, which is what they did. And then another project will offer them another stimulation or other sorts of possibilities. But then over time for them to claim their place within that matrix of possibilities, and to really claim it, and to not float forever. (P6,10,34)

4.6 Assessment Practices

Questions 14 through 26 focused on the issue of assessment practices. For many participants, assessment was often interchangeable with grading, and both of these were seen

as essentially inimical to artistic creation. However, when assessment was meant to serve as a form of feedback, reactions were much more positive (see below).

4.6.1 Preparation for assessment. As previously discussed, the majority of participants who could recall how they were assessed reported that, as students, they had found the experience and the grades they received to be generally opaque. Several also expressed their disappointment at the lack of feedback they were given.

Those who went through formal educational training did not find that they were adequately prepared to deal with issues of assessment. The majority of those with informal training, whether as graduate students or as newly-hired instructors, also reported being unprepared. Although two participants described the experience of serving as teaching assistants to have been useful, what little awareness of assessment practices most participants were aware of having gained was most often through informal means or essentially by osmosis.

4.6.2 Feedback on assessment practices. Question 16 asked whether participants received any feedback regarding assessment practices from either faculty or administration. The majority reported that no such feedback was given, and that the majority of discussion regarding such matters, when it did take place, was through informal conversations between colleagues.

In many cases, the only feedback that was mentioned came in the form of student teacher evaluations, which were notable for the amount of negative reactions they garnered from interviewees. Specifically, the move from conducting these evaluations in class to an online system was considered to have been detrimental, as notably fewer students were bothered to fill them out (P4,16,75; P6,16,70), and many students saw them as an easy way to conduct personal attacks whilst retaining absolute anonymity, as they could complete the evaluations outside of the classroom(P13,16,57; P14,16,90).

Yearly teacher evaluations were mentioned by 3 participants, all of whom included these as having been part of their administrative workloads whilst chairing their respective departments. However, neither these, nor evaluations for those applying for full professorship, focussed on assessment practices, unless the issue of grade inflation was raised.

4.6.3 Attitudes towards assessment. Assessment was generally seen as at best problematic.

P11 described it as stressful and “the most unpleasant part of the job” (P11,23,96), and P12 as “difficult” (P12,26,102). The majority of participants found assessment particularly problematic due to its essentially quantitative nature, which they believed made standard forms of assessment inadequate when applied to a qualitative subject such as art. Assessment was described as “a science which is not about honesty; it’s about numbers and other things” (P14,15,75), whereas art involved “a lot of [variables] that [are] heuristic and unpredictable and [pause] multiform, influenced by a huge variety of factors” (P12,26,102).

[That’s] probably where I do have a problem with assessment; it’s that it really doesn’t touch on the things that are really important or critical to art and design. I mean, you can assess things, you can tell whether the person turned in all the work on time, you can grade, create a rubric [pause] but [pause] it lacks a lot. I mean [pause] I use rubrics, and I find them useful, but there’s a lot that is not. So you have to have critique. If you just use rubrics and displace critique [pause] that’s what online learning lacks often is [pause] then you don’t have rigor, you just have filling in the blanks. (P14,15,77-79)

P14 gives a telling example relating to his own learning as a student of the difficulty in assessing the “intangibles” (P14,18,101) of art-making.

I mean, the lessons I remember the most [pause] I mean [pause] I had a professor who was like [pause] he came up to me and said “your drawing is fine but your painting is dead; let me hold your brush for a minute.” And he worked on one area for about ten

minutes and he said “watch what I’m doing”. And I watched him, and it was [pause] it changed everything.

And then, it was, because you get to see, and you get to feel the touch [pause] and then [pause] so now when I talk about painting [pause] I mean, when I learnt fresco painting, I went [pause] you could read about everything [pause] we knew what the process was, but what I didn’t know was the [pause] how it felt. . . . How fresco painting feels is like when you leave the milk on the counter overnight and it forms that skin and you can rub a cotton bud across it and not disturb the surface? That’s the touch you need in fresco painting.

That’s what you have to teach, and how do you assess that? That’s the problem with assessment in general is that what we’re teaching doesn’t have [pause] you come back to [the] statement about accounting; we don’t balance to zero.

So how do you assess when Sally pushes [her brush over the canvas] harder than Juan? How do you know? I mean, in many ways that’s just a stylistic preference. (P14,14,65-66)

P10 similarly described assessment in studio art instruction as a fluid process that did not lend itself to quantification.

[Students] want clarity and when you talk about progress it’s difficult to characterize that because it’s so [pause] I could break it up [pause] so, “you’re technique for doing this was not so good, but now it’s better”. But it’s hardly ever about technique; it’s more about how they link their ideas with the realization of those ideas. And they’re learning the criteria of what makes good art, and not from a list like you’d ask previously. There’s a lot of interpretation.

And it’s hard to swallow because it’s vague sounding. So I do my best to break it up. So “relationship of technique to the work”, “relationship of the idea to the completion of the work”, and so on. So I try to break it up, but it’s not so clear. I’m sure they feel that way. (P10,25,85-86)

As mentioned previously, participants expressed that lack of time was a concern. Four participants also specifically complained of the amount of time that needed to be allocated to student assessment (P14, P11, P1 and P5). Although they all agreed that one-on-one forms of assessment, verbal or in writing, were most effective, they also found them simply too time consuming to implement given current class sizes.

I used to email [students] each a paragraph where I thought about the work . . . but if you're regular faculty and you're teaching as much as we teach, which is a lot in terms of contact hours, it's not really [pause] I can't do it anymore. (P11,24,104)

Because if we were really honest about assessment; it needs to be individual, it needs to be in coordination with their currently stated goals and objectives of what they want. Who the hell has time for that? That's just [pause] Wow! (P14,42,171-172)

4.6.4 Assessment methods. In answer to the question “What methods do you use when assessing students?” (Q23), the most prevalent method mentioned by all the participants was the group critique, generally involving themselves and the students participating in a given class. Though ten participants also listed one-on-one critiques, three of these (P2, P15 and P1) specifically stated that they considered the everyday interaction between themselves and students to fall into that category.

The assignment of grades was a requirement for all instructors, however the frequency at which they were assigned varied. Certain instructors did so at every stage at which a given work was presented (P4 and P6) whilst some gave two grades (one half-way through the course and one at the end) and others only gave a final grade.

Written feedback was given by seven participants, and six had their students hand in portfolios of their work at the end of a course.

Four also went to the trouble of taking digital pictures in order to be able to keep track of each student's body of work and allow them to clarify – and in some cases, rectify – their

grading decisions. P4, a sculpture instructor, went as far as purposely taking several digital pictures of each student work at various intervals during their creation.

I critique, then I document the work at every stage, and at every stage I present them with a grade and every time I look at the documentation of what they've done so that it's a realistic reflection of what they've accomplished and that I'm not just putting a biased opinion on it. (P4,23,107)

For P6, the digital pictures were part of an overall approach to giving feedback.

Written feedback I write [pause] I give them grades and written comments on everything they do. Sometimes I wonder why I do that. I think it's partly that I forget and I want them to take work home once it's graded. I document it with a camera. I have a file on every student I teach in any given year, and then I write [pause] almost like movie reviews. It's stuff that came out in the critiques; it's probably not surprising to them but I write it down so they get written feedback on everything they make. I don't know how common that is but I like to write. I like to concretize it, so they can't say [pause]. It's not defending myself, but it's to make it clear. Sometimes when they read it, it's like "oh, man, he's serious", or whatever, or [pause]. The point of argument, it doesn't matter, they can disagree with me but if it's written on paper, it's not likely to be. (P6,23,100)

4.6.4.1 Rubrics. Although the use of rubrics was discussed by only 10 of the instructors, the general consensus was that they allowed for increased transparency as to what was expected of students, and how they were assessed. For instructors, the building of rubrics forced them to go beyond general impressions and reliance on professional instinct (see 4.7 below), as well as ensuring that they took into account factors unrelated to the artwork itself, such as attendance and participation. Rubrics also ensured that subjectivity and external factors didn't unfairly penalize or elevate students' grades.

P11, P9 and P14 agreed that having rubrics allowed students to see exactly where they were doing well and where they needed to improve, essentially serving to justify the grade they were given.

So someone might be really good conceptually, they might be really good at articulating their practice, they might have a really good historical context but a terrible execution.

And that might be because they just didn't do it right or it just fell apart in the kiln, but in any case it is [pause]. That way it's never a complete failure or a complete success all at once it might have done really well at some things and not at others.

So when they get their assessment back they have some idea of where they've done well and where they need to improve. And that allows for a more successful approach to students who want to redo their work; they have to submit the original rubric so that you the faculty member who's moved on and looked and dozens or hundreds of works can remember "ah yes you're still really bad at this craft thing; no, this redo is not accepted", or "it's an amazing comeback." Whatever it is, it gives you a marker in time. (P14,22,142)

4.6.4.2 Multiple assessors. Though only mentioned by three instructors, the use of multiple assessors was seen as a singularly useful practice. P7 explained that the inclusion of several instructors in the grading process was common practice across his department. For P11, this was an added benefit of teaching a course with another instructor. P1's experience, however, was more informal.

in first year there was a grading room and so, with art and design faculty grading all together, and so you always would meet different people in the grading room; lots of good camaraderie and talk and sharing and just [pause] I think I learned a lot, certainly with dealing with first year and kind of first year grading when I first went into first year teaching, through those [pause] it was really good sharing. I got a sense of where I was; mostly I thought: "Ok, I'm definitely fine".

So there were sort of alternate beats. Well that wasn't feedback, but in a way it was. You can compare what you're doing. Because you're all grading, sometimes you're talking to the same people with the same projects. So you can think, "Yeah, there's an A." (P1,16,78)

4.6.5 Assessment criteria. According to participants, students were assessed on a wide variety of criteria which can be organized into five major categories: *Student Engagement*, *Student Investment*, *Student Artwork*, *Student Progress*, and *Student Professionalism*.

The first, *Student Engagement*, covers assessment criteria that can by and large be described as based on social interaction; this included attendance and participation. The terms "openness" and "generosity" were also used by several instructors to indicate a willingness to both give and take carefully considered criticism and, if need be, act upon it.

The second, category, *Student Investment*, encapsulated criteria linked to students' overall attitudes towards their work. This included such things as effort and commitment; what P3 referred specifically to "ambition" (P3,26,67). Related to this was the willingness to do research, which could be observed through the student's articulation of their knowledge regarding historical and contemporary art subjects.

Certain criteria related directly to the third category, *Student Artwork*. First amongst these was technical skill and formal qualities, as well as whether the work demonstrated that the student had followed whatever specific guidelines given by the instructor regarding the work (see also 4.8 Assignments vs Projects). Intentionality was of importance here as well; both that there should be some indication that intentionality was involved in the creation of the work, and also, though less importantly, that that intentionality had been successfully communicated through the work.

Intentionality matters. Craft is a criteria; purposely making something off key as well as making something highly sophisticated; knowing when to use what. Being contextually specific; so being attentive to what wall it's being placed on. The fact that the pedestal is

noticed, doesn't emerge out of thin air. It's part of a long messed up set of conventions; if you put something on a pedestal, we'll talk about the pedestal. (P13,22,95)

Eight participants spoke directly to looking for proof of the fourth category, *Student Progress* or development over time. P4 specifically explained that using this criteria enabled instructors to take into account the varying skill levels that might be encountered within a single group of students.

The first thing I would have to say is that it comes down to the year. First year student is different from a third or fourth year student. In the first year, [they] should be assessed based on not just the finished object; there should also be some criteria of skill acquisition. Accumulative learning; although they came into the class not knowing how to hold a hammer, they have acquired certain skills. Compared to a student who's come in who knew how to make something already, you kind of have to almost mark on a bell curve, or [pause]. Did they really push themselves? Did they acquire new skills? Even if the sculpture turned out horribly, is that just simply because they were learning and they're acquiring. Did they push themselves, spend the required amount of time on the project? Does the object have some sort of thought beyond making something pretty and delicate? (P4,20,88)

Finally, five participants (P5, P12, P7, P9 and P15) mentioned assessing *Student Professionalism* by looking at how they presented themselves and their work, as well as assessing students on their writing skills by including a written component to their coursework.

4.6.6 Grading. If assessment in general was considered by most a problematic annoyance, the subject of grading was met with universally negative reactions. With the perceived potential to do more harm to a student's learning than good, the quantitative nature of allocating grades was considered by many participants to be counter to the complex, rhizomic nature of art-making.

The devil being in the details, the more increments a department used in their grading process, the more difficult the process became. Five participants explained that this was most clearly the case when using percentiles rather than letter grades (P4, P5, P10, P11 and P3).

We do numerical grades, but the students only see the letter grades A, B, C, D. And there's no minuses. That allows me to grade them, but if I give them an 88, they'll want to know why they can't get a 90. They'll want to know specifically what cost them that 2%, and we get into a really stupid argument.

Whereas if I give them an A, they'll want to know why they didn't get an A+, and it's easier to give them a range of issues. (P4,42,180)

The difficulties are between say a C+, C, B+, A. Those in between marks. The difference between a C and an A is easy. Or even a C and a B. But it's those in between grades. 70 versus 75; that doesn't make sense. (P3, 26,91)

P15, P4, P13 and P7 considered that students' fixation on their grades was a hindrance to their education, as they were often more focussed on their grades then on the actual feedback they received, or on cultivating their own commitment and personal motivation. Low grades, according to P13, could affect students' self-confidence to the point of being "debilitating" (P13,21,89). Participants almost universally stated that they tended to de-emphasize grades in their classrooms and steer their students away from allotting any importance to them. After all, according to both P4 and P15, grades were essentially an institutional tool that had "little to do with the actual instruction in the classroom" (P15,14,191).

[It] helps them [to] realize that ultimately grades don't matter. I make it clear that what your grades will get you is scholarships and it'll get you into grad school. If you don't have an A average you won't get into grad school. And if you do, you won't get any scholarships or funding. So grades matter in how you navigate the institution.

Your portfolio gets you shows. . . . Grades are basically for the bureaucrats to understand what we do. And honestly, if you're going to survive in academia as an

artist, you have to understand that; there's what you do as an artist, and then there's how you speak academically. Grades is just the language for navigating the system. And for convincing people to give you money. (P4,41,178)

Overall, grades were seen as generally pointless and irrelevant to the teaching and learning of art, not to mention students' future careers as artists.

I also feel like if the student comes to class and they do something. I mean, can you really fail them for that? Is there a way of failing them even if the work is terrible and they're never going to become a practicing artist; what's the point in failing them?

The fact is that when they get to the final level and they graduate, if you're not motivated, you're not going to push it further. You're not going to go on to grad school. You're not going to go on to be a practicing artist. (P7,33,182)

Interestingly, according to P14, his own institution had effectively rendered grades meaningless through the use of portfolio reviews.

[At] this institution we have a policy of portfolio review to get into the program, so grades are [pause]. If they fail the class they won't advance to the next year but [pause] passing is a D grade at this university and most students don't get Ds so it's all portfolio based so the emphasis has been entirely removed from the grade structure and it's all about the work. (P14,25,162)

However, he then went on to explain that the holistic nature of portfolio reviews meant that it could be difficult for staff to justify their decisions to interested parties such as parents, which was the main goal of using grades as assessment indicators in the first place (P14,25,163).

The only positive aspect of grading that was expressed (by P9, P4, P5, P15 and P10) was its use as a motivational tool, either as encouragement or, as P9 stated, "to wake someone up" (P9,25,128).

By giving that student who struggled all semester to get their ideas out; they experimented but their sculptures turned out horribly, but because they pushed themselves and experimented they get a B when they were expecting a D. That's something that can really push them to the next level towards being an artist.

(P4,42,182)

And also sometimes you get a really cocky student that you just need to fail because they're really good artists, but they're not learning. You need to express clearly to them why they failed and why they're not going to succeed by doing what they're doing.

(P4,42,186)

4.6.6.1 Grade inflation. The issue of grade inflation is worth noting for the number of times it came up during the interviews. Mentioned by more than half of the participants, it was described as a major problem, but one whose root causes were far from clear. P10 admitted that she preferred to inflate grades for fear of diminishing her students' self-worth (P10,26,92), while P11, P9 and P12 complained of what they perceived to be a growing sense of student entitlement. P4 went further, claiming that the neo-liberal narrative that treats students (and their parents) as customers resulted in an administrative reticence to allow instructors to give failing grades.

[What] we're realizing now is that we're in an age of inflated grades; everyone gets A's and B's. When I fail a student now, it's amazing how much work it takes to fail one student. How many appeals and grade revisions go on.

And it rarely becomes about [pause]. When we're assessing potential transfer or graduate students, everyone has an A average. It almost is a pass/fail system in a lot of ways. Either you get an A, or you might as well have failed, because it's really not that hard to get an A or B+. And that's the pressure of "everyone has to go to university"; "they're paying customers . . . so they deserve an A". (P4,42,190-191)

P2, ever the contrarian of the interviewees, acknowledged the problem, but was adamant that his marking should not be influenced by administrative interests.

I'm in conflict all the time because I protect the student's marks. I mark over the bell curve. . . . You see there never is an official policy to bell curve, but they try to intimidate you to think there was, and you'd be surprised how many people complied. And I'm the rare exception.

I mean [pause] a half hour conversation with the dean "can you send me the policy, please? I'm finished talking to you now, let's have the policy"! So the dean goes on and on and on and on and on and on [pause] and like "ok, I'm putting the phone down. If you do anything, I'll be after you, but the marks stand". So I stick by it. My students get good marks, and that's the way it is. If they do the work. (P2,16,74)

4.6.7 Feedback. If one were to illustrate the data from this research on assessment as a scale of positive to negative, feedback would be at one end, and grading at the other. Whereas the quantitative quality of grading mentioned previously was seen as making it ineffective for studio art assessment, the qualitative nature of feedback made it the preferred alternative.

P1 and P2 equated the one-on-one feedback that they gave students in class to be both the essential element of teaching, as well as a form of assessment.

What we do in studio is assessing; just to give feedback. And as I had said that that was the feedback that I had had from my teachers, that's [pause]. And I think that's key for teaching art. Teaching what we teach. (P1,23,118)

Written feedback in particular was considered to be extremely useful. Though P3 (23,84) and P11 (24,104) stated that they no longer gave written feedback because of how time consuming it was, and P9 preferred to use verbal feedback in order to be able to respond more immediately to student concerns, P4, P7, P5, P6 and P1 found that it was more helpful for students to receive detailed comments in writing that both the students and they themselves could refer to later on. In addition, written feedback was found to help justify grades to students, and minimize grade contestations. P4 in particular noted that this served as an effective tool for promoting formative assessment and learning.

[I] strongly stress that written feedback is important. Verbal is important, but written feedback is something they can go back to that protects them as a student and protects me as an instructor [from contestations].

Generally in written feedback I say something positive and then I say something that needs to be addressed or that they should think about in the future, something that may not have worked about the piece. Then I say something about going forward, looking into this, think about this etc. What that does is give them encouragement and helps build their ability to accept criticism and also accept direction. And then I keep a copy of that myself, and the next time I go to assess them, I refer to that and see what they've accomplished; how they've responded to my comments, where they've gotten to. So in terms of cumulative learning it's a fairly clear way to assess. Are they taking the comments and are they applying them to how they develop as an artist and a student, or are they just refusing to look at it. (P4,23,108-110)

4.7 Professional Intuition

Artwork in general, and the visual arts in particular, lend themselves to immediate reactions; we look at a piece and within seconds, perhaps a minute if we're feeling generous, can turn to a friend and tell them how we feel about it. Actually giving concrete reasons behind our reactions, however, takes more time and intellectual effort, but usually doesn't take place because the average viewer has no one to answer to regarding their judgement.

Instructors, for their part, have to explain to students the pronouncements they make regarding their work in order for learning to take place. Yet this does not mean that they do not have immediate reactions to what they see, as P6 describes.

You know what? Sometimes it's just the degree of investment. You can feel it. And I don't mean that you have to spend [pause]. You can do a great painting in twenty minutes. There are examples of people who can do that, but not very many. Very few can do that. So a Robert Motherwell can do a beautiful Zen kind of painting, but he

might do thirteen of them before he has one. So I think that success comes, again it comes back to my idea of work. Investment. You feel the investment in a work, you know. The investment isn't just time. It's, you see the actual investment, you see the choice, the aesthetic investment, you feel the pallet that's been chosen. (P6,18,85)

What the above statement hints at is that instructors, like any other viewer, may well make immediate judgements regarding a work. However, they are also capable of analyzing such judgements based on their years of personal experience making, looking at, thinking about and assessing art. Where professional intuition, a subject which was addressed by a majority of participants, becomes more problematic is that it is not always something that can be deconstructed with any certainty; being the product of a lifetime's experience, it is effectively a gestalt which may not lend itself to being atomized into categories and criteria.

Whether or not it is preferable, let alone even possible, for professional intuition to be cast aside solely in favour of rubrics, more than half of participants expressed their belief and confidence in the judgments they could make concerning the quality of student work as a result of their years of experience both artistic and academic.

I've learned that because I've spent the last twenty five years practicing almost every day, looking at stuff and doing those value judgements, so that I have a fine sense of nuance, a fine sense of tonal relationship, a fine sense of structures. And I've really studied [those] structures all my teaching professional life.

So I'm really not arrogant when I'm saying I can really assess, because it's not hard for me because I've spent my life doing that. And I also think I also [pause] I am an empathetic person and I also know I'm alive to the world, I know that the world gives me a lot of pain and sorrow and [pause] and incredible joy, so those responses to paintings too. That's all part of it as well. (P1,20,111)

Interestingly, P12 was able to further support her confidence in her own "gut instinct" (P12,26,108) using several examples both within and outside of the field of art.

Well, there is a degree to which one's expertise when one becomes a professor of art does enable one to intuitively make aesthetic judgements. There was an article in the New Yorker about how appraisers were able to authenticate ancient vases at a rate that so outperformed computer programs as to be just be absolutely obvious that they were massively [pause] the idea that there is [pause] that intuition is a form of synthetic intelligence.

Now of course you check yourself and you don't necessarily assess the student that way, but when someone presents you with work that just bowls you over you have to acknowledge that there's something going on with it that's useful. And there tends to be wider agreement as well.

[American art critic] Jerry Saltz says that good art is an object that gives off more energy than was put into it. And that's an assessment of one of the most important art critics of our time. It's legitimate to use those criteria and that does influence our program here. And we all agree on that. (P12,26,106-107)

There's a lot of recent research on diagnosis; Columbia University Center for Narrative Medicine, which talks about the relationship of narrative to diagnosis, of gut instinct to heuristic practices in medical treatment and how that is something that insurance companies cannot account for, but that it works better, and it's a new trend. I find it's absolutely applicable to our practices, to assessment. (P12,26,108-109)

P11 and P1 both found that their instinctive assessments matched the grades reached through the use of rubrics and percentages, however both explained that this was a skill that they had developed over time. P1 explained how she came to create a simplified rubric

I didn't find with number rubrics worked. I did do them when I first [taught] first year and I spent days marking. [Students] would get 80 but [I thought] their work [should] be worth 75. Or they'd get sixty and their work was worth maybe 69. And then [I'd] go back and adjust every single point.

[So one day] I came in on a Saturday and I sorted them all in A B C D piles, very quickly . . . [Then] three or four days later I sat down with them and I marked them with the rubrics and I found that I came out with the same [grades]. So I thought that “Yes, I’ve been teaching long enough that I sense now the difference”. So I got to this shorter termed rubric that gave them information. Was it good? Was it just good enough, or fail. Then I could land them with the mark and they understood how they got it.
(P1,23,237)

Though she did not elaborate on the subject, P12 explained that she developed her rubrics in order to take into account her gut instinct. For their part, P3 and P9 admitted that if, upon calculating a grade, it did not match their intuitive assessment, the former would be sacrificed to the later.

I try, but in the end, the percentages don’t always reflect what I think the student should get. So I fudge the percentages, I have to admit. (P3,26,93)

4.8 Assignments vs Projects

During the course of the interviews, it became clear that there was an important distinction to be made between two types of tasks that were part of studio art students’ coursework: *assignments* and *projects*.

Confusingly, these terms were often used interchangeably by most of the participants I interviewed, despite the fact that their comments revealed that there was a clear difference between them which determined many aspects of their pedagogical roles and effectiveness. For the sake of clarity, I therefore have made a choice regarding the appropriate terminology based on the definitions of each term.

The Oxforddictionary.com defines an assignment as “a task or piece of work assigned to someone as part of a job or course of study.” Project is defined as “an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular aim”.

Given the emphasis of the former's definition on the work having been assigned specifically within a course of study, and the latter's openness to application outside the context of an institutional setting, I believe that my choice of terminology to be the most appropriate. The discussion below regarding the nature of each of these will also undoubtedly help to further support this choice.

4.8.1 Definitions and functions. Assignments have clear criteria that are established from the outset. The objective of assignments are invariably that students explore and/or demonstrate a proficiency in specific technical skills and/or understanding of formal elements, such as use of colour, light and dark, a particular compositional choice, or a particular method of using a given medium. P15 describes these as tasks that require students "to jump through certain hoops or to demonstrate a certain level of mastery of a certain thing. Or at least an understanding" (P15,21,242).

In comparison, projects are essentially self-directed. Although a general theme may be given by the instructor, my personal experience as an art student at three post-secondary art institutions over the last twenty years is that such themes often serve as little more than a potential source of inspiration for those students within a class who have difficulty deciding upon subject matter of their own accord.

The following quote from P6 emphasizes the principal difference between these two types of tasks.

If [a student] walks into a model class and they have someone there clothed or unclothed, standing or sitting or whatever, they have a challenge and they deal with that challenge. Good, bad, medium; at all the different ranges. (P6,40,151)

The above task is clearly an assignment. The subject matter is objective – a model – and the task is principally technical; to depict the model using a given medium. P6 then continues,

But if you walk into a class and the teacher says to you, “Ok, I expect six paintings by the end of the term, and I want them to be in relation to each other, coherent, a body of work”, some [students] will just say, “I’ve never done that, I’ve never self-directed”.

[So] that's one of the challenges at the upper levels. And some people never have any issues that way. I mean, I have a lifetime of paintings in my head, and some people do, and some people don't. And the people who don't [pause]. How do you help them to find methods to do that? To generate [pause] to generate [pause]. Because there is no overarching thing. (P6,40,151)

This second task is what I define as a project; the exploration or demonstration of technique is no longer the focus of the work. Now the principal goal is for the student to use those techniques to create a work which embodies a set of pre-determined ideas or concepts.

Several participants (P11, P4, P14 and P15) explained that, logically, students are meant to start with work that focusses on building proficiency in a particular technical skill, before moving on to works that allow those skills to be used in order to explore particular subject matter.

Interestingly, P15 theorized that the problem of grade inflation at his institution was found to have increased as one moved from the foundation level courses upwards may be precisely because of this switch from assignment to project.

Perhaps because you’re moving from the assignments to the projects; from the work with clear objectives to the open ended creation of art, from the objective to the subject, so it’s “safer” to give general A’s than risk having to tackle the issue of “what is good art. (P15,16,223)

Several comments indicated that assignments were often easier to assess than projects due to their focus on technical training. This may explain in part why instructors such as P2 and P1, whose teaching and artistic practices are strongly focussed on formal aspects of painting, expressed little general difficulty in assessing student work. In the revealing quote below, P1, an

instructor with a strong background and interest in colour theory, compares herself to her husband, also an artist.

I have to say I'm really fortunate because of colour; because of the colour structure. You know, I'm married to an artist who also has very strong opinions about what's good and what's not, and he's really anti postmodernist and all of that and I think [pause]. I can work on those abstracts and formal principals and just let go of my [subjectivity]. [I] can assess a painting and say, "Yeah, look how that works!" You can kind of float with that and really appreciate that. So this is much of the enjoyment of the world I have, because of assessment. (P1,20,110)

P9 expressed the same notion, though not quite so enthusiastically.

I taught colour foundation. That one was like math. You do this, you do this, you match colours, it was like math. It was the easiest course to mark. But everything else is difficult. (P9,25,131)

4.8.2 Problems arising from these differences. As previously mentioned it was clearly expressed by participants that the overarching goal was that students be able to move from assignments to projects. When they do so of their own accord as opposed to within the parameters of the curriculum, however, this becomes problematic; sometimes a student might be given an assignment, and instead hand in a project. P1 put it this way,

Here's an example: I have a student who's given me a beautiful painting. I would have that on my wall, it's beautiful. It's high key, it has beautiful shapes, it's flat shape design. [But the assignment] was supposed to be representational [and this] isn't. It's a lovely little painting. But does it meet the criteria? No.

And so that piece as a painting works. [But] as a student work that needs to fulfill certain requirements. That's a problem. That's always difficult to mark. (P1,17,100)

P14 explained that outside the context of the classroom, the failed assignment might well be deemed successful.

[Often] you'll see that a project is a failure, or has a very poor grade, but then in the end at the juried exhibition it's a top prize winner. That's because it has intangibles that are part of the artistic cannon but that's just not what [the instructor] was going for.

(P14,17,93)

Additionally, it is impossible to gage at what point a given student will be capable of transitioning from creating successful assignments to creating successful projects. In such cases, P14 argues, it is up to the student to demonstrate that this evolution has come through a process of self-reflection as opposed to chance.

Sometimes the goal is obviously [pause]. You have to get them out of the nest so at some point they need to find their own voice and expand beyond the boundaries of some random assignment that people have invented, so [pause]. When and how do you let them take [that] on.

So if they move out of the parameters of a project but it's a brilliant move, how do you assess that? In many ways, I just say go for it. In many ways you want to let them go. I guess you just have to make them aware that they've left the boundaries. I guess that where it's a successful thing is if they can articulate why they've left the boundaries.

When it's a failure is when they didn't even know they left. That would be the difference; they didn't even pay attention to the rules versus the ones who knew the rules but then were very clever about moving outside of them or realized that they'd outgrown it.

I guess that's the thing; once they act like sentient being that really are self-aware and know what they want to do next, that's when it's appropriate to move them forward.

And then that's the point where you engage them on their own terms, whereas before you were engaging them on a term that was maybe just a parameter of a class. That's when it starts to become art. (P14,20,124)

An assignment, according to P14, can therefore become a successful project if the student can articulate a logic behind why they've left the boundaries of the assignment.

For P1, however, such an approach does not take into account the dynamic of the classroom. Though each student functions individually, they are nonetheless part of a classroom community, the members of which are all meant to be working from, and be assessed according to, the same criteria.

I do that in critiques, actually. [I'll say] "This is a really lovely; look at that! It's wonderful, it's original, it's fresh, it has authority. But wait, it's wrong here. It's not on paper".

Students want to hear that, because, they think "Yeah, well, I could have done that too, but it says on the outline I have to do this and this and this." (P1,17,100-104)

Essentially, rewarding a student who has failed to follow the assignment criteria penalizes the remaining students. Such a work may win high praise within another context; within the classroom, however, if the assignment has not met the required criteria, it must be deemed a failure.

Another differentiating feature between assignments and projects, as pointed out by P6 below, is that by nature of the freedom accorded to projects, these will tend to become more intrinsically motivated in nature. Students will therefore have a more personal attachment to their work, which can be the cause of difficulties in the classroom.

People cry during critiques. Interestingly enough, not so much at [lower levels] because it's [set assignments]. Even though they're investing, even though they're developing, even though they're starting to have a body of work that's their own and they can count their own, they see it still as [an assignment]. So to succeed or fail or have someone say something critical about [an assignment] is one thing.

When you get to the higher levels, they feel much more like it's an extension of who they are. And then an attack on the work or a criticism of the work becomes a criticism of who they are. That's the hardest part. And when someone is lacking in skills, or lacking in success with their work, and they've taken it to heart. And you have to be critical, they sometimes cry, and I don't quite know what to do. You stop. And you try to gauge whether you can go on, or whether you can't go on. And sometimes you can, and sometimes you take a break. And sometimes you can't go on. And you deal with that student later on your own. So that's the hardest. (P6, 33,137-138)

P1 recounted a case where it wasn't the student who'd made the work who was emotionally affected, nor even the other students in the classroom, but rather the instructor herself.

I have had student work that has made me cry. Rarely. Twice. Yeah, that's an interesting situation in the classroom. Yeah, I think I had to step back; that was a difficult piece to assess because I was so emotionally impacted by this piece of work. It was an older class and I had been working a lot with death, and it still [pause] a hard piece of work [pause] and [pause] I [pause]. And the class could tell, so then [pause] so how are you going to assess this? Because really you're just emotional every time you think about it, and I had to step back and talked to the class about the work.

It was an excellent learning situation, and I [pause] I had to do some talking and thinking. I gave myself space and time to think about how I was going to assess that work, and how much the formal impact. I think that's maybe the hardest piece of work I've had to assess [pause] fairly. How do you do it fairly?

You have to be careful when you give projects. You see with first year work, it doesn't happen. But I'd obviously devised a project [pause]. . . . it just [pause] it was [pause]. Yeah. (P1,20,114-115)

As P1 points out above, these emotional issues tend to surface in the later years of undergraduate training; this is supported by the previously discussed notion that students are meant to begin with assignments and move on to projects (P3,44,117).

P3 also emphasized that it was the instructor's responsibility to navigate these sorts of situations and ensure that students maintained a level of professionalism so as to stay focussed on their learning.

I hate when [the other students in the class] are put on the spot with that kind of stuff that's too emotional and personal. Not that I don't encourage them to be personal, but it's not a therapy session. If that's what the work's about, we can talk about, but then I'll try to contextualize it; talk about other artists who work the same way, their background etc. But it's just I don't encourage them to kind of wallow in the narcissism. Because it's an artwork; you are doing something. It's got other things to talk about.

[It's] great, [that they're] so invested in it. But then, once it's public, it's public. And it has its own responsibilities. It's really a question of responsibility for what you're doing, and not to say "This is it; these are my feelings, and back off 'cause that's how I feel and therefore you can't say anything about it".

But then there's got to be responsibility on the part of the course director. If they love to go there and stay there and encourage that without creating some frame for it, then you're going to get that. As the prof, you have a lot of influence; you can shape what happens in the class. The kind of environment you create; what is permissible.

It goes with a certain [pause]. I believe very strongly that it goes with professionalism. We're not therapists. I see my educational philosophy as a facilitator. And I won't facilitate that kind of emotional wallowing. There's a place for that, and it's important to do that kind of work, but I think that the idea of boundaries is really important!
(P3,34,117-120)

4.9 Assessing the Student, Assessing the Work

As discussed above, there can exist a very personal and emotional relationship between artists and their work, and in Western culture, these are often considered to be inexorably entwined. In general terms, I have often pondered how an artist's biography, personality and behaviour affect the way their art is considered by others, be they gallery owners, curators, buyers or members of the viewing public. In a pedagogical setting, however, this issue gains added import; how do instructors separate the two – or do they? For the above reason, I included within my interviews the question “What is the relationship between the assessment of a student and the assessment of their work?”(Q21).

Participants generally acknowledged that a close relationship existed between a student and the work they produced, and that the two could not readily be separated.

It's really interesting, because in the field of art you work really closely with individuals. And that can really impact on the art they make and how you see their art. (P8,21,126)

Certainly, according to P14, P4 and P2, student attitude and behaviour often affected the quality of their work.

Students that have a bad attitude towards their work and don't want to perform, and you wonder why their work is usually poor. (P14,21,132)

If they don't really have an interest in conceptualizing and articulating their own concerns than usually the object won't be very successful anyways. (P4,27,133)

This did not mean, however, that there was a direct correlation between the quality of the student and the quality of their work. P4 explained that poor artwork was not necessarily indicative of a poor student.

So although their projects may not be the most outstanding significant work in the class, if they're progressing as an artist, as a student, if they're pushing boundaries and trying to challenge themselves, than I think that can be rewarded in terms of grading and you

have to assess them based on those things as opposed to just solely on their work.
(P4,21,97)

Nor was successful work a sign of a good student.

And also sometimes you get a really cocky student that you just need to fail because they're really good artists, but they're not learning. You need to express clearly to them why they failed and why they're not going to succeed by doing what they're doing.
(P4,42,186)

Participants further indicated (P7, P1, P4, P6 and P11) that students were being assessed on criteria outside of the work itself such as attendance, participation, effort, etc. This conscious separation meant that a student might get high marks for their works, and low marks for these other criteria.

Student development was often mentioned as a criteria related to the student but which could often be seen in the artwork itself.

There is a relationship because I will take into consideration the student and the effort that they've made, and whether I think that they could do better or they haven't. There is a relationship. (P3,21,57)

P6 and P7 further explained that the inclusion within rubrics of these student-centered factors helped to ensure that the work alone was not the principal focus of assessment. Candidly, P6 also admitted that to do so also served to help counteract more subjective, personal reactions to student behaviour.

[You] try to be honest with yourself; part of you wants to punish the asshole, or the person who doesn't attend, or the arrogant one, or the annoying one, but [pause] I don't think I do. I try to be, you know, even handed about all that stuff. [laughs]

But sometimes that's hard, because you know, sometimes in a class, it doesn't happen very often but occasionally you'll get someone who's just really annoying; they just don't

come [to class], they email you, they pester you, they want to know what they missed... "Did I miss anything"? "Well of course you missed something"!

So, yes of course that factors in; that shades how you see their work. You can't avoid it. But I think it's usually their work that I'm looking at. Attendance is a factor. That's how you clear yourself of that bias by making attendance and punctuality and proper engagement in the course worth twenty or thirty or whatever of the grade so that even if someone manages to do high quality product and they haven't invested in the class, they're not going to do as well as the person who's always been there *and* is also doing good stuff. So it's both. (P6,21,75)

P15 recognized the problem as being one of "familiarity": "We know from intimate conversations with [students] what they're up to, so sometimes it's hard to step back. You have to actively do that, as well as manage your own expectations, criteria, hopes, aesthetics, values" (P15,33,347).

Along with the use of student-centered rubrics, P7 also went further by re-evaluating his students' portfolios outside of class with other instructors and T.A.s. By doing so, he claimed to ensure that his personal opinions of the students did not overtly affect his assessment.

What was made clear in these interviews was that there was a great deal of variation, between individual instructors' understanding of the relationship between students and their work, and how this relationship could or should affect the instructors' assessments. P8 (21,128) admitted not being able separate the student from the work, while P7 (21,111) stated he found it "quite easy". P11 (22,89) claimed that the assessment of the artwork had to be focussed on first and foremost, while P5 considered the student to be most important:

So I feel like there's all of [these] factors that are related to the work, but it's not just looking at the finished work itself. It's not that the goal of the class is to make a finished, polished work, it's about all these other things. (P5,21,99-106)

In other participants' responses, various levels of confusion were revealed. P12 seemed to be unsure as to what was meant by the question.

Oh [pause] um [pause] I'm not even sure what it would mean to assess a student. I mean, on what criteria? Just as any other human being except that there are the mandates of the professional relationship which require that you treat them civilly, and fairly and graciously, and professionally, even if you don't like them.

That fortunately has been very rare for me. But unless they are overtly unethical and that somehow is deployed in the professional space, you don't really have a right to assess them as a person. (P12,21,81-83)

P10 claimed to make no distinction between the two, only to then contradict herself:

I don't assess a student, I assess the work. But when I say "assess the work", I also think about their participation, their engagement, their research. (P10, 21,74-75)

In the case of P13, the more he explored his thinking on the subject out loud, the more uncertain he became.

I don't think we're evaluating people, we're evaluating works and how to become better at making works. Maybe that's too strong a statement, but [pause.] Once we start evaluating people, then people start feeling really proud of themselves!

[laughs]

[The grade is] the result of the work. If they fail [pause], the grade being assigned to anything really gets away from what's really going on. Because you can learn so much from messing up in a critique, you can have a terrible critique, and it be a pivotal moment for your progress and I think that deserves an A. But if you look at the work, and what they did wrong [and it's] all bad, and so it should get a different grade. But in terms of evaluating the art or the artist [pause]. I think I'll change my mind on that in a few minutes. Yeah, I don't know. (P13,21,88)

Eventually, he finally dismissed the matter as essentially irrelevant to the student's learning.

I think artists [pause] I think that part of what we do is try to train artists to be professional so that when something goes wrong, they don't [pause] they don't own their grades, they don't own their successes or failures in a way that might falsely promote themselves or falsely debilitate themselves.

'Cause when it gets to that situation, that's when I think grades are meaningless because they don't really [pause]. Does someone get an A or does their work get an A? And the work might be more complicated. Their physical labour or work progress is way more complicated than if it's something innately virtuous about themselves deserves an A. (P13,21,89-90)

P6's response was more puzzling.

Um, I pretend to be assessing the work, but I'm also assessing the student. Which usually benefits the student, I have to say. So if you've got a student who's trying really hard but who just is not that good, I will reward the trying really hard, so [pause]. (P6,21,72-74)

It is unclear why P6 feels he needs to "pretend"; does he think that he *should* only be assessing the work, but, like P8, is unable to? Or does he mean that he doesn't want the students to realize they're being assessed along with their work? If so, why not?

Finally, the most entertaining response, came from P15. Using an apt, albeit creative, metaphor, he described how he viewed the relationship between the student and the work, and how these could be assessed in tandem.

[In] the majority of what I do and how I evaluate, the student and the artwork are one. And I say that, not in the sense of "do I like the student or not", what I mean is that in my philosophy of approaching the work through behaviours, . . . the stuff we make is like a residue; fossils. I jokingly call it poop. We make poop.

[laughs]

Just like . . . sciences study fossilized defecation and learn so many things about it, the same way learn things about the poop we make. You encounter it, [and] if you have a certain knowledge base you can decipher it to certain degrees. You can find out more about it [pause] it'll tell you a lot about the maker of it, especially if you have a lot more of it than just one example. If that animal in this metaphor eats better, whatever better means for that animal or environment, it's reflected in the poop. So if you consume good things, whatever good is for the direction you want to go in, your residue – your poop – becomes more deep, rich. So I use this metaphor and they chuckle, but they get it. So what we make is poop.

So the poop is not what's fore fronted; it's you as the consumer of the food and the producer of the poop. So I can look at your fossil and say "nice poop", "it's well done; nice consistency". But it's everything else which is important too; what I can learn from it is part of the evaluation. What type of behaviours and what types of lifestyle choices that you've made, not just eating. Are you looking at books? If a prof or student has suggested you look at a book have you done it? How's this evident? Are you in there working, or are you just talking and distracting? Are you doing the types of things, for this project or assignment or course, that is going to allow you to start reaching that upper echelon of food connoisseur so you can make better poop?

So it's very much tied into [pause]. You are the art. (P15,21,233-236)

Chapter 5: Data Analysis - Critiques

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2) the critique has long been recognized as a ubiquitous part of studio art courses. The critique is a social proceeding involving students, their instructor and occasional guests, in which participants focus on discussing student work. Its significance is such that it is considered to be a signature pedagogy, a notion coined by Shulman (2005) to describe the characteristic forms of teaching and views of knowledge that are considered to be intrinsic to particular fields of learning.

The critique is further considered to help develop key skills including technical craft, self-reflection, critical skills and risk taking (Klebesadel & Kornetsky, 2009; Owens, 2007; Sloan & Nathan; 2005). Importantly, it is often also seen as serving a very particular role as a pedagogical tool for the professionalization of students; its essentially oral and social nature introduces them to a particular community of practice (Dannels, 2005; Klebesadel & Kornetsky, 2009; Vaughan et al., 2008).

The above positive attributes are often counter-balanced by a plethora of seemingly incompatible criticisms. Indeed, critiques have a strong cultural lore of being vague, unstructured, emotionally charged and highly subjective (Barrett, 2000; Blair, 2006; Bulka, 1996; Elkins, 2001; Jones, 1996; Klebesadel, 2006; Percy, 2003; Shreeve, Sims & Trowler, 2010). The fact that there is a marked lack of practical literature, let alone empirical research, on the subject does little to help matters. What can be found on the subject tends to be focussed on critiques in design education, and what remains is often steeped in anecdote and common pre-conceptions, both positive and negative.⁸

In this chapter, I focus on the data I collected that revolved around the subject of the critique. Data from both interviews and observations have been merged throughout, comparing

⁸ For the sake of clarity, from this point forward I will use the term 'student/artist' when referring to a particular student whose work is being discussed in the context of a critique.

and contrasting where applicable the information related to me by the participants with what was observed during the critiques.⁹

I begin in section 5.1 by first discussing the attitudes of instructors regarding critiques; the importance they place on them as well as the aspects of critiques that they enjoy and dislike. I then go on to examine and categorize a number of different critique types (section 5.2) and strategies (section 5.3). This is not an exhaustive list, by any means, but rather an enumeration of the various approaches to critiques conducted by the participants or mentioned in their interviews.

Section 5.4 looks at the objectives of the critique as stated by the participants, and 5.5 examines the main problems that they have experienced conducting this form of pedagogy. Finally section 5.6 examines the important and yet under-recognized role that language was found to play in the critique.¹⁰

5.1 Instructor Attitudes Regarding Critiques

5.1.1 Professional opinions. As previously discussed in section 4.6.4 regarding the question “What methods do you use when assessing students?” (Q23), the most prevalent method mentioned, and the only to be referred to by all the participants was the group critique. It is clear that for most respondents, the critique had played an important role in their own post-secondary studio art education as well; when asked about their experience of assessment as students (Q14), two thirds included critiques within their answers, and half of these could remember nothing else of note.

⁹ It should be noted that in 5 cases (P5, P8, P10, P13, P14) I was unable to observe critiques conducted by the participant instructors, however I have included those interviews within this chapter as I found them to be of sufficient interest that they should not be put aside or discussed separately.

¹⁰Henceforth I will use both the term “critique” and its shortened form “crit” interchangeably, as the latter is often used by the participants in their interviews and in conversation.

The importance they attributed to the critique was categorical and unanimous across all the interviews. In their answers to the question “What role does the critique play in your overall evaluation of a student and their work?” (Q27) the majority expressed its prominence. P12 stated they were “absolutely essential” (P12,27,111), P13 described its role as “dominant” (P13,27,123) and P15 described them as “the main forum for evaluation” (P15,27,282). Some went even further, stating that they were “central to art and design education” (P14 27,177) and “the most important tool for teaching art” (P11, 27,131).

P14 explained that the critique made up for the weaknesses of quantitative assessment.

Again, that’s probably where I do have a problem with assessment. It’s that it really doesn’t touch on the things that are really important or critical to art and design. I mean, you can assess things, you can tell whether the person turned in all the work on time, you can grade, create a rubric. But it lacks a lot.

I mean, I use rubrics, and I find them useful, but there’s a lot that is not [pause] so you have to have critique. If you just use rubrics and displace critique [pause] that’s what online learning lacks often is [pause] then you don’t have rigor, you just have filling in the blanks. (P14,15,77-79)

Furthermore, he also viewed critiques as a way of making up for a lack of one-on-one instructor contact time by giving feedback to as many students as possible simultaneously.

Because if we were really honest about assessment; it needs to be individual, it needs to be in coordination with their currently stated goals and objectives of what they want. Who the hell has time for that? That’s just [pause] Wow!

And so the art school model is still the model that’s closest with critique. That’s still where you’re giving students time on each project and as it gets more advanced you’re giving them more time. (P14,42,171-173)

For P15, the critique serves as *the* moment of assessment; the feedback given to the work by the class is assimilated with his own judgement as well as his observation of the participation of each student/artist in the critique in question.

[M]ost evaluation is given in group critique settings like this. And they can always request a private critique. I don't collect work. I grade as I go. . . . I'm able to take notes during the class, so by the end of this day when I go home, those five or six people will have a grade for their projects and participation so far. (P15,23,275,276)

Not everyone was entirely clear as to whether critiques were relevant to the question of assessment, however. P9, initially stated that the group critique was one of the most important assessment methods she used (P9,23,105), only to later state that critiques play no role in assessment at all (P9,27,141), and that they had no effect on her assessment of students and their work (P9,27,145). Instead, she considered them to be primarily a forum for giving and receiving feedback (P9,27,142).

The second outlier was P7, who considered critiques to be primarily an opportunity for building a sense of community within the classroom by “celebrating” student work and giving them the chance to “show off what they’ve done” (P7,27,145). However, earlier in the interview he described using the written notes he took during critiques in order to formulate detailed feedback (P7,23,130).

Rather than serving as concrete exceptions, however, these two cases indicate uncertainty amongst certain instructors as to the relationship between assessment and feedback. Evidently both P9 and P7 believed these to be separate rather than interconnected.

5.1.2 Personal opinions. Though it was agreed that critiques were extremely important, this did not mean that all participants were entirely comfortable running them. For some (P1, P5 and P11), the critique placed particular focus on themselves as perceived specialists in their field as well as their position of authority in the classroom, which made them uneasy.

For others, critiques were inherently tiring exercises. Successive hours of intense concentration and debate and the necessary effort required to moderate and guide often large groups of students could not only be a daunting task, but also an exhausting one.

I find it difficult when you have to do a whole group of people at once because it draws so much mental energy when you have to switch from one person's ideas to another. When you're in charge of the critique [pause] not in charge but when you're conducting it [pause] there's so much mental energy you have to walk in so many shoes [on] that one day. Walking in one person's shoes is tough, but having to walk in twenty people's shoes, that's hard. (P14,33,209)

[Critiques aren't] my favourite aspect of teaching, really. No matter what I've said about them and trying to figure out the ways to do them and they're successful. There's a little part of me that thinks "OK, buck up girl, it's critique time. Here we go." (P1,35,201)

Despite these difficulties, however, respondents indicated that there were plenty of things about critiques that they enjoyed (Q34). P13 and P8, P11, revealed that the discussions that took place often brought new insights not only to the students, but to the instructors as well. This was, to them, a great source of personal pleasure as well as professional satisfaction.

But by far the most common positive aspect of the critique that was mentioned was the overall sense of community that they can generate, and the back and forth that comes from focussed discussion amongst individuals with shared enthusiasm and appetite.

It's really pleasurable when people come together and talk about a work and try... Like I said before, sort of brainstorming collectively and trying to think about how that work functions as it is and how it could be. I like the communal discussion. And that exchange. In the sense that they're students but they're also colleagues because they're working in the same realm that I'm working in. So it's that chance to discuss the things that we all love; that language, the ideas, all of that, the aesthetics. We have a common passion that we are all in to discuss these things. (P13,34,174)

The answers to the question “Please complete the following sentence: A good critique is when...” (Q32) followed logically from the above comments. Respondents were all in agreement that the best critiques were those where students were “engaged” (P8,32,161; P10,32,116)), “lively” (P3,32,109), “hard working” (P6,32,133), “energized and excited” (P4,32,156).

This depth of engagement results in a forum for “informed debate and critical discussion and disagreement” (P4,32,157) where “minds [have been] changed”, “ideas challenged” (P13,32,160) and “new insights are gained” (P15,32,343). In such critiques “the meaning of the work is explored, articulated, insights are made and that provides a foundation for further activity, further creativity and further research” (P12,32,133); successes have been pointed out, as well as “where [the students] should go to better themselves in the future, and makes them feel properly successful and satisfied with what it is they’ve done” (P2,32,154).

P13 summarized the key reason for his enjoyment of the critique succinctly.

Personally I don’t find critiques to be difficult; not because they’re not complicated and not because there aren’t difficult things going on [but] I just realized that those are the moments where things happen. It’s weird that critiques are my favourite thing because of what they do; it’s one of my favourite pedagogical spaces because of that.
(P13,33,164-166)

5.2 Types of Critiques

During the course of conducting these interviews a variety of different types of critiques were mentioned by the participants in the context of one question or another. Some I was able to witness first hand, whilst others were only described by interviewees. Although I have little doubt the examples that I came across do not make up an exhaustive list of the possible iterations that exist of the critique, I believe that they are worth enumerating here, if only to emphasize the extent to which crits can be found adapted by instructors, and that for a variety of reasons.

Critiques may be summative or formative, and some of the methods described below may be more conducive to one or the other type. P14 described formative critiques as being a method used by “the best” of instructors (P14, 22,140). P1 and P7 also emphasized their importance, as they allowed students the opportunity to internalize what had been said by instructors and peers before furthering their work towards completion. Speaking specifically of photography, P7 explained that formative critiques could lead students “to make adjustments, reprint things if necessary, [and] reconsider the sequence [and] the editing of the project” (P7,30,163).

5.2.1 The conventional crit. This is by far the most prevalent type of critique in terms of how often it was mentioned during interviews and, in my personal experience, it is what most people tend to think an art school critique involves.

Consisting of an instructor and the class of students, in this iteration of the critique the student/artist begins by saying a few words about the work before the rest of the class discusses its merits and weaknesses. Questions are asked of the student and discussions arise, sometimes between the student and their peers and sometimes amongst those peers as well. Often the instructor will interject during the proceedings and be the one to make the last comments before moving on to the next student’s work.

Minor variations of the conventional crit are many, the main variable being the inclusion of individuals from outside the class. P7, for example, occasionally brings together several sections of the same course, or guests such as local artists, so that not everyone involved is already familiar with the work being presented. Furthermore, he explained that it was common practice in his department for instructors to bring in one of their colleagues to the final critique (P7,23,127-128).

P15 explained that to do so was helpful in mitigating what he identified as an important problem in critiques, namely the sense of familiarity that often forms within the classroom. “[Instructors] know from intimate conversations with [students] what they’re up to, so

sometimes it's hard to step back", he explained. "Someone coming from the outside might see things with fresh eyes".

And that's also transferred down to the students being familiar with each other's works, or being actual friends. So that's something to always keep pushing up again, because it's not going away, but even within oneself or within the group, to really as best you can get to what the work is doing; not what the hopes are for the works, not for what we know the works are doing based on prior engagement, and other things like that. (P15,33,327)

Observing precisely just such a critique, I noted that the presence of another instructor elevated the level of discourse taking place. Occasionally a conversation would evolve between P7 and his colleague concerning a formal matter or a particular technical approach, whilst the rest of the class listened attentively. Given that normally the interaction during a critique is between the student/artist and their peers or students and their instructor, this approach presented the class with an opportunity to listen in on a discussion taking place at a higher level of field specific knowledge than what they would otherwise be privy to. The potential disadvantage to this approach, however, was also obvious. Very few students spoke during the length of the critique; the conversations became centered on the instructor, the guest, and the individual student/artist, whilst the rest of the class looked on. Class participation was therefore affected, though the trade-off for the class was the opportunity to witness the discussions that took place.

5.2.2 The Modernist, or "cold-read" crit. Taking as its inspiration the Modernist notion that an artwork exists as an entity unto itself rather than as an object created by a specific individual, the Modernist or "cold-read" crit does not include the student/artist in the conversation, but rather has the class discuss the work as if they were encountering it for the first time, without having had any interaction with its creator. Mentioned by several instructors, the opinions regarding its usefulness were mixed.

So usually in a critique situation we try and explain to our students that we are setting it up as if we don't know you; this is the Modernist paradigm. So here's this artwork, and I don't know that it's been done by whoever. It's this thing I'm coming across in a museum for the first time. That's the best way to try and approach a critique is to try and separate [the work from the student/artist]. (P8,21,127)

I was able to observe P11 conduct a critique in this way, and was impressed by how seriously and effectively her students took the Modernist approach on board. So accustomed were they to this method of critiquing that I was uncertain whether or not the student whose work was being discussed was actually present in the room; the entire discussion took place without anyone turning to the student/artist in question or acknowledging them in any way, and it was only at the end of the conversation that P11 made a few comments directly to them.

She explained during our interview that it allowed for the class to see how the work functions "without [the student/artist] speaking on behalf of it" (P11,27,133). This helps avoid the problem, discussed below in section 5.5.5, in which the qualities inherent in the work itself are obscured by the student/artist's oral explanations. In *Why Art Cannot be Taught* (2001), James Elkins refers to the notion that participants in a critique can analyze the work as a completely separate entity from the student/artist as an "enabling fiction"; "a lie that lets us get on with what we want to do" (p. 132).

Interestingly, although P8 describes the Modernist crit as the preferred method used at her institution, later on in the interview she expressed reservations regarding this approach.

I don't like to keep using it because it just means a certain suspension of disbelief, but I think that it's common practice for people looking and writing about art that they still use that lens, so it's probably a good model. (P8,27,147)

For P5, however, this method is problematic precisely because it separates the work from the student/artist.

I don't find it works really well; I feel like most of the time, people have work that has [pause]. It's not just within the work itself, but there are all these different factors that

inform what they're doing that are outside of the work, and I don't think the critique is about the work only. It's about all these other things. (P5,29,156)

P14 similarly elaborated upon this argument, explaining that he found it to be essentially antithetical to the pedagogical objectives of studio art education, as it evaded any methodological discussion about how the work was actually created. He was of the opinion that the student/artist should be willing to take charge and "steer" the direction of the critique if they found that it was veering away from what they wanted it to achieve (P14,23,253). Such an opportunity would, by definition, not be possible in a cold-read crit.

Finally, he saw it as a way for students to escape taking responsibility for what they were presenting.

That's a bad critique; it's just a nightmare! Nobody's going to contribute to the defence of their own work [and] to the explanation [pause]. Talk about a critique that can go off the rails, when there are no rails in the first place! You're nowhere! A good critique is when people say what they think it's about. And if they don't know what it's about, they say they don't know what it's about. (P14,32,200-203)

Several instructors I observed used the cold-read as part of the critiques they conducted, but added different elements to the exercise. In the critiques conducted by P4 and P11, for example, they began with the class's opinions and readings of the work – ostensibly a cold-read crit – but, once they had finished discussing the work, the student/artist was asked to respond, and explain how what had been said was in accordance or differed with their intentions. At that point the conversation became one between the instructor and the specific student/artist; the rest of the class ceased to participate as the instructor became their representative in the proceedings, condensing and reiterating the main points made by the class. This particularly structured approach allowed for the class to initially discuss the work amongst themselves without being influenced by an initial speech by the student/artist. The final stage of the critique, in which only the instructor and the student/artist participated, allowed for a more focussed conversation than if the whole class had been involved, and gave the instructor the chance to rephrase the previous discussion more succinctly.

P12 divided the students into groups of three and had them select one of the works being presented that day. The task they were given was to put down in writing a description of the formal and thematic elements of their chosen work and then compose an interpretation of its meanings and concepts. Once all the groups were ready, each in turn had to present their interpretation of the work they had chosen, and explain how the formal and material strategies used by the student/artist supported their reading. Only the members of the group were allowed to talk about the work directly; the role of the rest of the class was to question them on their interpretation, while the student/artist remained silent and took notes during the entire activity.¹¹

5.2.3 The Master crit. In this critique, it is the instructor who takes center stage; students are present principally to listen to the instructor's praise and criticism of their work. This was the least represented approach to critiques in the data; more often than not, it was discussed negatively, possibly because its top down approach to learning, with a strong emphasis on the instructor's position of authority, is currently not favoured in popular pedagogical theory.

P14 mentioned that he largely avoided using this method except during formative critiques discussing works still in progress (P14,27,182). P13, who was greatly concerned with issues of power structures within the classroom, preferred to keep his active involvement during the critique minimal.

Only two instructors used this method in any clear fashion. P6's critique took place in the context of a second year painting course; the subject matter of the assignment was the historical approaches to the use of lighting effects in painting. Students were asked to complete a piece using a physical model as opposed to their imagination or a photograph, and replicating the lighting effects from a particular historical time period.

¹¹ For more on P12 and this critique, see Chapter 7.

The critique in this instance began with what was essentially a Master crit. Given the specificity of the assignment criteria and the subject under consideration, P6 spoke directly to those aspects of the works on show, pointing out strengths and weaknesses alike, and suggesting various ways to navigate any difficulties. Once his own comments were made, however, he opened up the discussion to the class as well.

Only one participant championed the Master crit, P2, and for this reason he is the subject of Chapter 6, one of the three case study chapters found further within this dissertation.

5.2.4 The proxy crit. A version of the Modernist crit that injects a further element of analysis and effort on the part of students, the proxy crit involves appointing another student to take the place of the student/artist and speak of the work as if it were their own. The student/artist is not allowed to speak of their own work during the rest of the day (P14,27,181).

5.2.5 The panel review. The panel review, involving a group of instructors from other courses meeting with individual student/artists, was mentioned by P9. Its inclusion of instructors who have not seen the work in progress and who may have not had dealings with the particular student/artist serves the same purposes as a cold-read crit. However, P9 also explained that the panel review served as an addendum to the regular class critiques. A requirement in third and fourth year studio art courses at her institution, an entire week of classes was put aside for these to take place; students were given half an hour to put up their work in a dedicated critique space and then half an hour allotted for the cold-read to take place with two to three instructors. Though she specified that these reviews did not affect a student's marks, those who fail to participate lost 20% of their final grade (P9,28,150).

5.2.6 The written crit. P14 explained that he incorporated a written element to many of his critiques. At the beginning of the crit and for each work being presented, he asks the students to put in writing their answers to several questions. These include:

What would you change immediately about this work, and what elements would you keep?

What would you title this work?

What's missing from this work?

What does it communicate?

This method, he went on to explain, serves multiple practical purposes.

So written critique is really important, and in that way I incorporate writing in the curriculum, because at 9 o'clock in the morning, who the hell wants to talk about artwork 'til you've had a chance to think about it? And if you're forced to write it there's a familiarity there, there's a chance for someone to put something down; even the quiet ones, they've written it down and the person gets it. They don't put their names on it so you're getting these 17 anonymous sheets of paper. (P14,27,183)

P15 also stated that, by asking students to occasionally write their critiques rather than express them orally, they learnt to elaborate their writing and thinking skills for use in their artist statements and other similar documents.

It is also worth briefly noting that several of the critique methods discussed in this section, such as the Modernist crit and the proxy crit, can also serve as opportunities for the student/artist to focus in a similar fashion. As they do not have to engage directly with their peers during the discussion, they therefore have the chance to listen and take notes rather than feel that they have to respond immediately to what is being said.

5.2.7 The one-on-one. During any given studio art class, the instructor walks around the classroom of students, watching them work. Every so often they will stop next to someone and

make a comment or suggestion; sometimes praising one aspect or another, sometimes giving advice or correcting a perceived fault or mistake. What I found most interesting about this interaction between instructor and student was that it was unclear from my interviews whether this was considered a form of critique in itself, or whether it was simply the act of teaching.

In section 4.6.4, only ten of the fifteen participants specifically listed one-on-one critiques as being amongst the methods they used to assess students; three of these specifically stated that they considered the everyday interaction between themselves and students to fall into this category. This resulted in a seeming conflation of assessment, feedback, instruction, and critique.

I believe my critiques occur in teaching at any given time. Again, this idea is that the critique is where you start every day; it looks at the difficulties and the shortcomings of the student and tries to advise them as to how to overcome them. It applies at every moment. (P2,30,137)

I guess we consider [one-on-one critiques] teaching. What we do in studio is assessing; just to give feedback. And as I had said that that was the feedback that I had had from my teachers, that's [pause] and I think that's key for teaching art [pause] teaching what we teach. (P1,23,118)

5.3 A Few Critique Strategies

Along with different general types of critiques, instructors also discussed specific strategies they sometimes used.

5.3.1 Subdividing critiques. In their respective critiques, P12 and P1 broke up their classes into smaller groups who worked separately before reassembling to give an overview of

their discussions to the rest of the class¹². I witnessed the advantages of this approach clearly in the case of P1's second critique; during the first half of the session, she struggled to get any of the twenty students present to participate and only she and the student/artist spoke. In the second half, she divided them into smaller groups of four and instructed them to discuss the works amongst themselves and take notes. The result was a rapid and noticeable change in the class dynamic; soon it seemed that everyone was actively participating, and where there had once been uncomfortable silence punctuated with P1's voice, now she was the one not saying a word, moving from group to group and taking notes. When the students reassembled together afterwards, the positive effects of the preceding division into groups persisted. Speaking to me afterwards, P1 expressed her pleasure at how well this approach had worked compared to the first of her critiques which I had observed.

P6 described dividing students into smaller group as well, though he did so according to shared interests and subject matter. In his view, this helped ensure that their particular concerns were addressed in greater depth as well giving them more time by having fewer students in each group (P6,51,118).

Several participants expressed that the large size of many studio art courses was inimical to effective critiques; group dynamics tend towards the more confident (read: loud, knowledgeable, arrogant, invested...) individuals, whether student or instructor, speaking more often and holding forth over the rest of the class. By subdividing students into smaller crit groups, however, I observed that more students participated in discussions. In the process, a greater variety of topics emerged, and these could subsequently be shared with the class as a whole.

5.3.2 Picking favourites. During his first year sculpture course critique, P4 began the proceedings by asking a student to pick which work would be discussed first. Then, once the specific critique was ended, the student/artist whose work had been the focus of discussion

¹² P12's critique is described in greater detail in chapter 7.

was asked to pick the next work. At first I took little notice of this strategy, until I realized that the works that I personally considered to be the weakest in terms of the formal qualities that I could observe were being ignored. Logically, I concluded, they would be relegated until last, when there would be less time and energy left to commit to them. I couldn't help but wonder if this was a conscious decision on P4's part, or simply a way of empowering students by letting them pick the work to be critiqued. During the interview afterwards, I decided to explore the topic in detail.

SF: I had a practical question about the critique I attended. Specifically you got the student/artist to pick the next work. Was there a particular reason for that?

P4: It's something I do with my first year students because it really empowers them and I really want everybody to participate, so if it's your turn to pick a work, you'll probably pick a work that you have something to say about.

I also realize as a faculty member [that] if I'm picking where we're going next then I'm going to pick all the interesting work first and the ones I don't want to do will tend to fall to the end of the class. So by doing it this way it keeps it interesting for me and hopefully allows me to avoid any bias.

SF: It's interesting, because how I read it was that by doing it this way means that people will pick their favourites and no one will want to pick the ones that they might find "weak".

P4: Yeah. [laughs]

SF: So you're avoiding your own bias, but you're allowing the group to make, basically, a group assessment.

P4: It becomes self-policing. The ones that get left for last, and this isn't always true, but it tends to be the ones where the student didn't put the effort or the energy in it, they haven't been present in class, participating. And then they're also the ones, when you get to the end of [the crit], students are low on energy and may not have much to say,

but they may also get much more bitchy and a lot more comfortable for taking somebody to task for slacking off. It's a community, and it's up to them to control them and make those decisions. And this is partially a way to make them understand that. (P4,34,163)

Effectively, this method meant that an unspoken consensus was reached by the class regarding which works were considered to be the weakest. By leaving these until last, it was almost guaranteed that they would be granted the least amount of time during the critique. In addition, the instructor would gain some insight, however vague, into the class's general aesthetic criteria.

All was not as simple as it seemed, however, as just as the critique was about to end for the day, one student spoke up to say that her work had not yet been discussed. She had set up her piece in a corner at the other end of the critique room. As the space in question was also the wood shop, it had been lost in the surrounding clutter of machinery, piles of wood and half-completed projects which had rendered it practically invisible. Whereas the previous few works had, as I'd expected, been given less time by the class than those examined earlier, this final "discovered" piece elicited a longer, more involved discussion that took us past the scheduled end of the session.

SF: The funny thing in this case was that it didn't work [the way you expected] because of the one student who hid the work in the corner!

P4: [laughs, nodding his head]

SF: That was great because I had this theory going on in my head, and then I thought "Aha, that's the exception that proves the rule!"

P4: Or there's always the one who puts something outside and nobody wants to go outside! [laughs] (P4,36,163)

5.3.3. Reducing instructor authority. My interview with P13 revealed a preoccupation with issues of power; whether cultural, institutional or personal. He was strongly aware of the heightened sense of authority that can be placed on instructors within the context of a critique, and in order to lessen this factor, he chose to see his role as that of mediator and facilitator within the group rather than that of leader.

[First] I try and walk them through it in physical terms: what do you see? What's it made of? Trying to make sure that once you've established common ground on the visual phenomenon, that that might lead to some of the other parts of the conversation. . . . So a lot of what I do tends to be paraphrasing, clarifying in question form what someone just said so that they can hear the question that they probably just made up and wasn't pre-formed. So that they can just hear it again.

Or if there's a fight or debate, try and mediate that; try and present the two different points of view to try and see if I can get other people to present another point of view, or see if anyone wants to change their point of view. So it's a lot of negotiating so that a better conversation can happen; a more critical conversation can happen. (P13,28,132-137)

This heightened awareness of his influence upon the classroom was such that he also consciously considered not only how he participated in the conversation, but also where he physically positioned himself in the classroom.

There's other ways that I lead critiques [which have] to do with my position in the room. If I stand to the front with a clipboard, then it's the whole classroom problem of [the authority between] teacher and students.

So I tend to move around and sometimes I sit on the floor if the students are talking a lot, or if there's a really interesting conversation going on I don't move a lot. . . . I'm very aware of where I'm positioned. Sometimes I might move around so that I might stimulate conversation, so that if people are sleeping in one corner, my being over there makes them a bit more alert. (P13,28,141)

5.3.4 Guiding questions. At the beginning of the first of two critiques I observed with P1, I watched with interest as she taped several large sheets of paper on the wall of the room on which were written a number of questions. As this was a colour theory course, the majority of these had to do with technical issues such as colour harmonies and the impact of colour on how viewers perceived the works. They were divided under two headings; one group of questions for the “viewers” and another for the “artist”. During the critique, the “viewer” questions were treated before those for the “artist”.

These questions served multiple purposes. Firstly, they helped prompt those students who were unsure as to how to approach the analysis of the artwork. In addition, they reminded students of the fact that this was an assignment, and as such, there were specific criteria that needed to be addressed. I noticed that students during the critique rarely mentioned matters of intention or meaning, focussing rather on the technical qualities emphasized in the guiding questions.

[Often] the quiet ones can be the ESL students and they're the ones who are looking at the [list], either as viewers or as the artist. And they'll look up because they'll be completely blank when they have to talk about their work. . . . Just some questions; they can go from one to the other and then the response from the audience generates more responses. (P1,32,180)

Not only did the questions help guide students, P1 explained, but they also served to both introduce, and remind them of, relevant vocabulary.

[It's] easy to forget when you've had years and years of talking about “value” and “saturation” and “colour” and “postmodernism” and “this informs that”, that that's new language to them. So [critiques] remind me to communicate also in their language. I have to bring them up here, but I have to *bring* them up here; I can't just talk up here and then just leave them all in the dirt, so to speak. In the dust; at the starting line. (P1,32,171)

Furthermore, the emphasis on the use of specific vocabulary could help avoid emotional outbursts by sensitizing students to the potential offence that critiques can inadvertently cause.

I think we're very careful about language. So I had those questions on the board and I often do in critiques have something posted that will offer some ways of describing things. . . . "What snags did you have", "what problems did you have?" So that they know what they can talk about.

But when you're talking about really personal things and there are snags, then [pause] I suggest some language and vocabulary to use [pause] around issues. Because I think difficult subject-matter can come up. So difficult subjects should be talked about. But when students don't have language, I think hurtful things can be said, and you know, people wade in like elephants and then I [pause]. So I think that just some care about language that's giving them some vocabulary. (P1,32,171-174)

One word in particular had struck me when I noticed that it was used by students multiple times during the course of the critique, and, as the interview took place afterwards, I was able to ask P1 to elaborate on the subject.

SF: It's interesting that you mentioned that use of vocabulary because I definitely have noticed your use of the term "snag", in fact I wrote it in my notes: "a good euphemism for a 'problem' or 'mistake'".

P1: [laughs] Instead of saying "Oh, that doesn't work", which no one likes to hear. Instead: "What's that snag?" That grew out of the colour course, because when it's a visual snag it's not really a problem, but it is like a snag; your eye goes there and it can't get off it.

SF: Like a thorn in your jacket.

P1: Yeah, it's maybe a gentler way or a different way around it. [That's] just part of how we give them a little language. (P1, 32,180-188)

5.4 Critique Objectives

Far from just being a forum for saying whether one likes a work or not, participants indicated that the critique had a variety of objectives. Not only are they “the main forum for evaluation”, according to P15

It’s also the arena for other types of professional experiences; from receiving feedback, giving feedback, presenting one’s work professionally, articulating themselves, either prior to the work, in defence of the work or in expanding on things that someone else has said.

All of that is super important because everything is present; their thinking process, their practice made visible through the products they present, they’re maturity. All of it is laid bare in a space like that. (P15,27,282-286)

By placing both the work and the student/artist in a venue for public interaction, instructors indicated that they were given an opportunity by which they could observe students behaviour and also learn about aspects of the work that would otherwise not necessarily be accessible to them.

5.4.1 Critiques as feedback. Critiques were universally discussed as essential forums for giving feedback to students regarding their work. Not only instructor feedback, but peer feedback was also constantly mentioned throughout the interviews, with P7 intimating that in some ways it could be considered by participants as even more important to them than what the instructor had to say.

I’m fine if that’s more important to them; those are their peers. And I like to tell students that the people that you’re coming up with now are going to be your network, your community, the artists that you are in group exhibitions with, you collaborate with, they’re going to become the critics and the curators that put you in shows. It’s the way

that it worked with my career and many people's careers. So what they have to say about your work is important. (P7,28,154)

It was also revealed that the social nature of the critique with its participation of the entire classroom of students means that all feedback is shared and can be discussed amongst those present, resulting in a venue where learning takes place amongst peers.

[It's about] getting to critical conversation. The critique can be individual but in the group critique there's a lot of learning through other people's successes and failures, and participating in those conversations. Either just being attentive to them, or verbally participating or getting into arguments. Those spaces of conversation I think are really valuable. (P13,28,129)

5.4.2 Revealing content. Another essential objective of the critique mentioned by the majority of participants was its capacity to reveal various aspects of a student's work that may not be otherwise apparent; what P12 referred to as the work's "latent content"(P12,27,114).

For example, by allowing students to speak directly about the work, an instructor can discover details about their process that can help determine whether they have put adequate thought and effort into what has been asked of them. P10 explains, "It gives me insight into they're process, they're ideas, what they're engagement is with the work. . . . It helps me to understand that when I assess the work, when I hear them speak about it" (P10,27,100-101).

The critique also allows for discussion concerning an important question regarding any artist's work, student or otherwise, namely that of their intention. On a most basic level, the critique allows the student/artist to explain their own intention, and importantly, "whether they've conveyed what they intended to convey" (P1,29,157).

I think by the end of the critique you should have an understanding of whether the students' goals, motivations, questions that the work might be demanding or asking, are

at all meeting up with what's actually happening with the painting. How connected are those things. (P11,30,146)

In the process of discussion, multiple interpretations can be discovered. If these differ from the student/artist's intended intention, this should not be seen necessarily as a setback or error on their part, but rather as an opportunity to explore unexpected new avenues of research and directions of thinking.

I keep the comments from [the T.A. and myself] separate because sometimes we don't agree, and I think it's important for students to realize that that's the way it works in the art world as well. You go to a portfolio review, you meet with someone who says one thing, and then you meet with the next person and they say something else, and a third person. You get all sorts of differences of opinion and I think that [pause], I'm not going to say that what I'm suggesting is final and the only possibility, so I think it's important for them to recognize that there are these other options and determine for themselves which is the right way to proceed. (P7,23,130)

According to P4, however, this process can be difficult for students who believe that the successful communication of their conscious intention should be the ultimate goal of the work.

A lot of artists, when they're engaged in the process [of art making], really have no idea [what they're doing]. They may think they know what they're making or why they're making it, but it's usually completely wrong. Most artists I know, it's only three or four years later that they can look back and say "oh shit, that's what that was about. It wasn't about that thing that I thought it was about at the time". And I think it's really important for students in critique situations to listen to their fellow students so that they can actually understand what their work is really about. (P4,29,146-147)

The above quote reveals a fascinating problem regarding the nature of art, and one that becomes even more problematic in the context of art teaching. Not only can a piece be read by viewers in ways that differ from what the artist expected, but even the artist's own stated intention may actually be incorrect. This speaks to the issue of human beings being quite

capable of misunderstanding their own thinking process, whether intentionally or not, into thinking one thing rather than another. From P4's standpoint, this is all the more reason for students to be open to what others have to say of their work.

Virtually all the participants of this study expressed that the discovery of these various factors, elements emerging through discussion which add meaning and depth to the work at hand, was a source of great pleasure.

I enjoy when students who are being critiqued seem to [pause], where the rest or the students or I bring discussion that is maybe not central to what the student originally thought, but is clearly inspirational. They see that something is embedded in the work that they didn't sense so much, and that it's meaningful to them. I get pleasure seeing when it's working. (P10,34,122)

It opens up my way of seeing and then there's so much, so many levels of depth that can be revealed through a critique or even other discussions that could come in out of [pause] that you would never anticipate. You could suddenly be having a whole discussion on race politics or something. It can bring up lots of [pause] stuff that is culturally interesting. Just interesting things to think about. (P11,34,161)

Several participants also pointed out that they themselves were just as likely as anyone else in a critique to be surprised by what the discussions might unearth in terms of meaning, intention and content.

Like when someone says something, and I've looked at paintings for a long time, really seriously, and I'll go "Wow, yeah, I didn't see that! And that really leads me to think x, y and z". So that's important too; for them to realize that the critical observations don't always come from the teacher, it can come from fellow students. (P6,28,127)

P1 and P13 both stated that the critique can directly affect grades precisely by virtue of being able to reveal aspects of the work that the instructor had not previously been aware of. P1 specifically stated that when this occurred, the grade was usually changed "for the better" (P1,27,132).

P13's discussion of critiques also intimates that there is a strong element of uncertainty involved in the process of what goes on in the critique.

In a really good critique . . . it's kind of ephemeral or ambiguous, but it's like [pause] when you thought that something was the way it was, and during the course of the conversation or critique, you realize that something else is going on. And you may not even know what that thing is, but it's really interesting.

One of the critiques this morning; it's not that the work hadn't clarity, but this student had been making this work all semester, finally put it all into a corner and it started to make sense in ways that it had never [before]. It was always going off in different directions and then suddenly all the different directions became something. And I'm not sure he realized it but I think the critique revealed that as happening. [And then] I realized that, going into [the critique], I was readying myself for the same critique of his work that I'd always had previously.

So it was a moment where even my notions were changed; he might have gone up in his grades even for that alone; the fact that you've changed my mind, or made something that is unpredictable. (P13,34,168-172)

In the above description, what is striking is to what extent it seems that the instructor has no more control over what is occurring than the students. "Ephemeral", "potential", "ambiguous", "unpredictable": all adjectives P13 uses to emphasize the unplanned and unexpected aspects of the critique which he finds so essential and exhilarating.

5.4.3 Critiques and community. Several participants spoke of how the critique served as a tool for socialization, helping to build a "community of the classroom" (P6,13,49), an element which P9 described as "vital" (P9,31,166). P6 explained that the benefits of building and belonging to such a community was a key benefit that students got by going to art school, and one they shouldn't take for granted.

Well there's the community of the classroom, and the commitment; if you've signed up to this course then really sign on, and if you don't want to, then split. There's no obligation; there's plenty of artists who never went to school or who walked out of classes and went somewhere else. But if you're gonna do it, than do it and be part of this group and don't be some super star that doesn't come to class, and don't be some whiner.

Furthermore, the sense of classroom community was something that could help introduce students to the wider community to which he believed all artists throughout history belong.

I invite them. I say that by taking this course they are entering this huge community that they may not realize just how vast and how exciting it is, but I hope that they really learn more about it from the class and that they learn to really thrive within it, because I do think that the best teachers for me and for my students are not gonna be me, but other artists. Their own mentors, the people they're going to choose to be their mentors. They don't necessarily chose me beyond registering, but they'll choose, let's say [David] Hockney, or [Philip] Guston, or Alice Neal. Those will be their real teachers and I think that's the community I'm thinking about here. (P6,13,49)

P4 more pragmatically explained that the critique essentially forced students to interact directly with each other and foster working relationships.

Because as artists we don't work in a vacuum, we draw from our community and we need supportive people around us. So it helps build a sense of community among students, which encourages them all to take ownership of the workshop and to make more work. (P4,28,144)

Because although the students work together and go through the same demos, they can make it half way through the semester without really talking to anybody else in the class. Whereas in the critique there's this sense that they're actually taking time to

engage each other; laughing together, sharing ideas. And it does begin to generate this sense of community, and that's probably the best thing about [critiques]. (P4,34,161)

P7 and P1 also expressed the belief that by showing their work together in one space and at one time, students could see what their peers were producing and that this in turn would create informal benchmarks for them to strive towards (P1,29,158).

Again, regarding the competitive spirit, when at mid-term [somebody] really levels up and shows a strong project, I think it brings the overall spirit of the class up, and people feel like "Hey, that person did something really great, and I want to do that as well". It's not intimidation, or students feeling dispirited because somebody else did something amazing and they can't compete with that. (P7,26,146-147)

P7 also gave an example of how the growth of a sense of community within a classroom could help raise the overall standards by creating a sense of personal responsibility amongst its students.

I had a case last night where there's a student who's really not been present in the class, and they haven't been engaged and it wasn't just me that jumped on them for the presentation of their work; they showed sloppy, last minute work, that was cobbled together. And the students really felt like: "Hey, we have a tight knit community here, and you're not part of this". I feel that because of that emotional attachment, they felt like: "You're not one of us, so we're going to question your work more thoroughly". And I felt the same way. "I haven't seen you in a month and now you put this together. Why? What is your intention? What is the role of photography in this instillation that you're presenting"? So [the discussion] became more critical. (P7, 27,146-152)

5.4.4 The critique and professionalization. Establishing communities of practice within the classroom also appeared as a theme within discussions concerning the critique as a tool for professionalization. Indeed, many skills that participants mentioned previously in section 4.5.2 as being part of this professionalization, such as learning to present work effectively and

developing critical thinking skills, can be seen to take place specifically within the context of the critique. These include “performing and curating and being part of their community; all the things that count out there in the world as professional artists” (P12,22,92).

Careful consideration of presentation and the role this element played in the reception of their work was often mentioned as an indicator of whether a student was striving to adopt a high level of professionalism or not.

[Students] put their work up, they present it as professionally as they can. Is it gallery height? Is it level? If there’s tape still hanging off of it? And if so, is that part of the piece? (P15,29,317)

P5 and P15 stated that this effort could even extend to how students present themselves, and not only their work.

Some people go as far as getting dressed up. That’s not required, but they feel like it represents their work better. Or is it appropriate to get dressed up? (P15,29, 320)

P7 specifically discussed the importance of learning how to present work in a public space, whilst explaining that expectations in that regard should be tempered by pragmatism.

I think my general attitude towards this [is to see if they] really try: they book the studio, and make false walls out of curtains, and they consider the lighting, and borrow equipment and they’re really trying to curate and present their work in a professional manner. And to the point where I’ve actually had to say a number of times “it’s only a critique, it’s not an exhibition”!

So on the one hand I think it’s important for them to think about their work already within a professional exhibition context. But then, it’s almost like they take it too far, so I have to recalibrate; there’s a limit. It’s important to think about what the possibilities are professionally, but at the same time it’s important to realize your limitations in terms of equipment and facilities. (P7,17,85-87)

The experience of the critique, according to many participants, also helped students develop their capacity for critical thinking and self-reflection.

P14 listed the skills necessary to take part in a critique effectively.

[How] to communicate an idea, how to criticize others without attacking, how to take critique without taking offence. And when someone is being critical of you in a mean spirited way, how to take that with [pause] how to get that critical distance. (P14,10,36)

P15 similarly said these included

[How] to observe, analyze, synthesize and interpret, working to be objective when necessary, or at least understanding when you're shifting gears between reporter, whistle blower, activist, and what your position is as the critical agent; those are valuable skills that go beyond any making of things, but also support the making of things. (P15,10,138)

It was also indicated that instructors were assessing students on these skills as well; P13 specifically stated that students were being assessed on their "criticality" (P13,22,101) and P12 on the "quality of their thinking"(P12,22,88). Furthermore, the first course objective listed in P4's course outline was "To cultivate critical thinking", and the first grading criteria in P3's outline was "Critical thinking through doing".

5.5 Critique Problems

Despite indicating in no uncertain terms the essential role played by the critique within studio art teaching, these interviews also revealed that there were a great deal of problems associated with them as well. The social nature of the critique which allows it its many opportunities was also revealed to be in many ways the source of its greatest weaknesses.

5.5.1 How long is too long? A practical problem related to critiques is that they are, by their very nature, time consuming. Several participants expressed frustration at the fact that

there's simply was not enough time to properly delve into the potential avenues of exploration that could emerge.

The critique sessions I observed lasted anywhere from one to six hours¹³, including breaks, with the time spent on any one student's work ranging anywhere from five minutes to over half an hour. In about half the sessions, the instructor used a timer in order to ensure that each student was allocated approximately the same amount of time. However, though dividing up the session into equal parcels may be fair, it is also arbitrary.

A key problem is that there is no way of actually knowing how much time might be necessary to properly discuss any given work.

I have a student in my third year a few weeks ago who thought [critiques were] just a waste of time after five minutes. But no, I think we get way more into the work after fifteen minutes. You're just staring at it, and then things start to come out that you wouldn't have anticipated. (P11,27,135)

P14 described how critiques could vary from thirty seconds to 45 minutes, but then went on to admit that "it seems a lot, but you could go on for hours" (P14,42,173).

One aspect of the problem as described by P6, is that students often find themselves exploring a wide variety of subject matter within the same class, depending on their interests and inclinations. The range of possible discussion topics becomes so broad that no one subject ends up being explored in any depth. In response to this, P6 separates students into smaller groups with common interests so that critiques can be focussed on those concerns (see section 5.2.1).

Another problem is that sometimes a student will present unfinished work, or work that is obviously of poor quality, at which point the instructor has to make a decision as to how to approach the situation.

¹³ And I have personally experienced critiques that went on for eight hours or more!

You know [pause] exactly what I tend to do [pause] where I am cruel, I suppose, is I give [pause]. In the context of the crit, I will give the amount of time the student gave to the work. . . . So when it's very clear not just to me but to everyone else in the class that this student did that the night before when it was a three week project we won't say that we'll won't look at it, but we won't give it much time. We'll give it the time that was put into it. (P6,19,88)

The end result of the above factors is that critiques can often be an exhausting process for students and faculty alike; I believe it is safe to say that anyone who has participated in a critique would agree that one usually comes out the other end feeling drained. The protracted level of concentration needed is extremely tiring, especially for the instructor, who is expected to be the one person present who is continually focussed on the discussion. It is worth adding that many participants who did not express this directly during the interviews or informal conversation did so through their physical bearing as I watched them at work.

[The critique] draws too much mental energy at once and then it's hard to give the first person the same amount of insight [and be] genuinely be engaged as the last person. It's difficult. (P14,33,209)

Finally, it should also be noted that some critique formats require more time than others in order to be effective. P12's critique method described in section 5.2.2, for example, required so much time that only six out of a group of eighteen students had their final projects critiqued in the space of a two and a half hours.

5.5.2 The sound of silence. Critiques obviously require participation through conversation, oral analysis, and the exchange of ideas. Yet students, especially in their first years of post-secondary education, have often had little experience in public speaking, let alone debate. Put simply, critiques can cause students to be literally "petrified" (P13,29,147).

During one critique, I watched as the instructor, P1, progressed from one work to the next only to have the discussion be no more than a lonely conversation between herself and

the student/artist. The rest of the class sat in silence, staring at the work and at each other. Half an hour and four pieces went by before any other student raised their voice, despite the instructor's repeated prompts. Even with over twenty five years of experience, P1 struggled to engage her class; nor was she the exception. Many participants found that the hardest aspect of critiques was getting students to speak.

Some students are just naturally ok with that, but then the problem is that they tend to dominate the conversation. It's the other students that are quiet and actually want to say something and have something really good to offer up but they're shy or they're nervous or they don't feel comfortable speaking in that situation. (P4,33,159)

Yet shyness cannot be the only issue; P1 explained that even in senior years, when students have already been through the critique process many times, she still found students were "not comfortable with speaking" (P1,32,177). P13 blamed this on a lack of student effort, describing silence as the cause of the worst critiques: an indication that "no one cares", he stated (P13,31,154). P9 similarly characterized silence as the ultimate death knell for the critique.

[When] no one talks; that's the worst. That's my syndrome with this current group; silence. So then its [pause] are they disinterested? They don't care about each other? They're too shy? They don't feel like they have enough to say? All manner of reasons. But it just kills the dynamic. It kills the learning community. Which is so vital to the whole thing. It's not me; it's everyone together that makes that learning community. (P9,31,162-166)

5.5.3 "If you don't have something nice to say...". On a similar note, students may also find it difficult to express their opinions regarding the work of their peers, not due to an issue of general shyness or lack of confidence, but rather due to the impression, whether valid or not, that there is nothing good to be said of the work or that it does not deserve the effort that such discussion takes. If the work is perceived as "half-hearted", either because it is unfinished or

because the student presenting it has “no interest” in what they’ve produced (P8,31,159), students may be uncomfortable with confronting their peer. Publicly recognizing the weaknesses in a peer’s work, let alone in some cases their apparent apathy or laziness, can be a daunting task for students, who may want to avoid seeming to be mean or cruel.

In the anecdote below, which I observed first hand, P7 recounts how a student who had shown little interest in the course during that semester arrived to present their work, which P7 considered to be weak and lacking effort.

There was a really tense moment last night when everyone walked into that room with the student who hasn’t really been present [this semester] and it was like: “Ok, who’s going to say it?”

And I usually try to get students to say it. Because if it comes from me, the student can become dismissive and say “well that’s just your opinion”! But if somehow two or three students in the classroom will come out and question what I was going to question. I try to give the space for that, but sometimes it doesn’t happen, and that’s brutal. Because then I’m the one who has to say “this isn’t working; what are you trying to do here?” (P7,33,176)

In this case, the lack of class participation puts the instructor in the awkward position of having to be the one to address the “elephant in the room”. Having stated the problem openly, the rest of the class may feel free to take part in the discussion, but this is not always the case.

And then sometimes people will jump on the bandwagon and try to support that, or other times it’s just me having a private conversation in front of a room full of people, which is just weird and awkward. (P7,33,177)

P4 discussed the same sort of situation, though with a very different outlook on its pedagogical merits.

Critiques where nobody talks are the worst. Unless, sometimes they become self-policing where there’s a student who’s a jerk to everybody and doesn’t put the time in

and when it comes to critiquing their work everybody is just dead quiet. It's a form of poetic justice. (P4,31,153)

If the above comments describe the problem of critiquing student work which is unmotivated, then we now turn to the other side of the coin, looking at the difficulty of dealing with work in which the student/artist is *over*-invested.

In some cases students can become emotionally invested in the work they present. If their instructor and peers are aware of this, it may deter them from being thorough in their discussion for fear of causing offence. On the other hand, if they aren't aware of the situation, or aren't sensitive to this problem, their comments may lead to strong emotional reactions from the student/artist in question.

P6 illustrated two such cases; the first perhaps a bit out of the ordinary, and the second less so.

It's a funny place, you know, because you get [pause] you get people who come here who want to be professional artists for sure. [But] there are a lot of people here for lots of reasons. There are even people who are here on doctor's orders; you know, doctor's suggestions that they come So you do get people where you get letters that say that they're on medication or that they're this or they're that.

That's fine, it's part of the deal in a big [institution] with a relatively open policy for admissions. But it's hard for the teacher sometimes. When someone cries and they say "Well I thought I told you I've got a nervous disorder!", and I'm "Well you should have reminded me before. It's not like [pause] I don't have 'nervous disorder' written in red pen over your face on my [notes]." I don't say that; nor would you want me to, right? But it does happen, so that's the hardest.

And the students who feel that they should be better now, but they're not as good as they think they should be because they've done these three years and they should be somewhere [pause]. They see other students being higher in their practice and they

wonder why they're not there when they've taken the same number of courses and so they get ultra- sensitive. (P6,33,141)

The overall problem is one of honesty, a subject which surfaced several times during the course of these interviews. For some instructors, the prospect of having to be critical could be a source of discomfort.

I find it really hard sometimes. Especially if it's a bad critique, there could be sometimes a group or a day where I feel like I can't be very critical. I mean [pause] I feel like I do give really supportive feedback, but I feel like sometimes people need to hear really honest feedback, and if something isn't working in my opinion, then I should be able to say so and [pause]. Sometimes either I don't feel like that person is able to. Maybe they're feeling fragile and I feel like if I tell them something that sounds critical that they won't take it well. Then again, I also feel like maybe that's ok. (P5,33,165-166)

Others, however, were adamant that if they didn't deal honestly with students, they weren't doing their job.

I'm paid to be engaged, and your fellow students are going to be nice to you and they're going to say [pause], they'll find the nicest possible things to say, and that's always great, but there's a point where you've got to stop saying that just to make the person feel good, and say "But, it's got some problems". (P6,18,84)

Because critiques that are love fests might feel good for a minute but they don't really do anything. (P13,28,138)

I actually try to get them to be a little bit brutal [pause] brutally honest. Not in a mean way, but if you're not telling them what's wrong how are they going to improve? Isn't that the biggest insult you can give somebody? (P14,27,184)

During a critique of P2's figurative painting class, I witnessed precisely the sort of situation as alluded to above. It was the final summative critique for the semester-long course, and the students had brought in all of their completed paintings. P2 went around the room,

examining each piece in turn, offering criticism and praise. In one instance he was clearly unimpressed; looking at three paintings by one particular student, he questioned various aspects of their colour and composition, and pointed out a few “lovely passages” before stating that the technique would perhaps have been better had the student made more of an effort to come to class. The reaction was immediate, as the student in question took a Kleenex out of their bag and began to quietly cry. Silence descended on the group and P2 moved on to the next group of paintings.

During the interview afterwards, P2 was to refer to the incident several times. In answer to the question “What aspects of a critique do you find difficult?” (Q33), he explained

I find that the people with shortcomings that are through their own fault are only difficult to me in that I’d like to be able to speak more frankly about it, but in a group situation I have to check myself a bit. On an individual, I’ll talk to them outside and I’ll be frank. So that’s the difficult one. (P2,33,157)

Clearly that afternoon’s critique had been an example of this.

[That] one girl I was rather negative to; she’s probably going to fail, and I didn’t want to make her cry in front of the class but I didn’t want to mislead her that she’s doing well. (P2, 24,144)

5.5.4 Power dynamics. Power dynamics were also mentioned as a source of tension that could arise in the critique context, the most obvious of which is that between the instructor and their students. As previously discussed in 5.3.3, P13 was particularly concerned with the authoritarian role the unwary or egotistical instructor can take on during critiques, saying “It’s like every word and everywhere I stand is fraught with problems of my own authority” (P13,28,141).

It is indeed perhaps unavoidable that instructors can hold a great deal of power within the classroom by virtue of the nature of their profession, and this can be seen perhaps more

strongly within studio art classroom given that therein the instructor not only holds the position of *instructor*, but also of *artist*. Several participants described having been witness to instructors who allowed their own aesthetic and ideological preferences to dictate their teaching, telling students “how to resolve their work according to their own agenda” (P12,31,131).

I think the other thing with the bad crit is the issue of instructors wanting students to conform to a certain way of doing things. Like “Ok, this is the important work, and this kind of work isn’t”. That always makes me nervous; where do I tread the line where I’m starting to put what I really value onto a student who may not have the same values. But that doesn’t mean that what they value isn’t valid. (P9,31,167)

And it’s so common. [The students] that are able to comply with this oppressive thing get through, but some of them just drop out and get really discouraged and they don’t like who they have but they can’t get around them, and they go to the [administration] but [they’re told that the profs] are great, when they’re just a clique. The [instructors] that I’m talking about, none of them are able to draw and paint very well, and they seem to think of themselves as having a role of superior to their students. “You’re lucky to have me” type of thing. I don’t understand; it’s weird, defensive bullshit. Very negative. Doesn’t do anything for the [student] at all. (P2,31,145)

Other participants acknowledged, however, that not all students reacted negatively to an instructor who exhibited a strong will.

I find that some of the most popular instructors are ones . . . that become like cult figures. And there’s usually authority attached to that: this is right, and that’s wrong. So it’s actually harder to teach when you don’t take such a strong position. But I think its way more important to be sensitive to each student; where they’re coming from, what they want to do. (P11,35,165)

I’ve also taught with artists who imposed their ideas very much more than I would, or think I should. . . . And I know that with those other artists, some students have thrived;

they've listened, taken on that perspective and carried on in a very confident and positive way as the sort of disciple of that artist. Other students can't abide by that and think they're being pushed and channelled. There aren't that many students who feel that way because they're so starting that they don't really understand that that's what's happening until later, maybe. (P10,14,52-53)

P9 brought up the interesting observation that issues of power can also come up between members of faculty, to the detriment of the student.

I've seen it in the individual panel reviews I mentioned with teams of faculty. I've seen students break down and cry because they're dealing with teachers who are also perhaps competing with each other. (P9,34,181)

Nor are instructors the only ones who can give in to the temptation of turning the critique into their own private lecture hall.

[That's] the difficult part at the higher end . . . where someone holds forth and takes over the critique. . . . We lose time with "the talker" who talks when really they don't know [what they're talking] about. (P6,51,118)

Several participants pointed out that students who were comfortable with discussing and speaking in public could often "dominate the conversation" (P4,33,159). This was, according to P15, part of the problem of group dynamics. "[Some] voices become more vocal, and others less", he explained. "And people who are really thoughtful and observant, you don't hear from. That's a loss of everybody" (P15,33,346).

Indeed, in the majority of the critiques I observed, I witnessed the above take place to a greater or lesser extent. A specific dynamic would evolve amongst the participants, usually during the first half hour or so, which most often continued thereafter more or less unaltered. A handful of students would emerge as the group that actively took part in the discussions whilst their peers stayed silent. Sometimes the instructor would try to include other individuals by asking them questions directly; in others they would ask one of the more verbose participants to keep quiet, in a manner that was only partially in jest.

5.5.5 Wolfe's painted word syndrome. In 1975, American author and journalist Tom Wolfe published a virulent attack on the New York art world entitled "The Painted Word". In it, he chronicled the rise of what he described as "art theory" and its effects on the art being produced at the time, the pinnacle of which, he prophesized, would be art which was indistinguishable from art theory as it could not be understood without the aid of some sort of textual explanation.

Whatever opinion one might have regarding Wolfe's criticism, his thesis has bearing upon one of the concerns expressed by several participants in this research, namely the issue of students relying on written or oral explanations to explain their work.

There are three main actors in a critique: the audience, the student/artist and the work. In the Modernist approach to the critique, the student/artist remains silent, so that their work may speak for itself and be understood and judged on its own inherent merits. In most other formats of critique, however, they are invited to speak to the class about what they are presenting.

Though this may well help clarify aspects of the piece in question, several participants indicated frustration at the fact that this often led to the student/artist speaking about their intentions rather than what is present in the work as it stands.

I mean so [many] students will talk about self-expression and about how this painting [pause]. I don't want them to talk too much. I mean, alright, say a few things but don't go on and on and on. I mean, the painting is here, so let's see what the painting does, you know. . . . I think the painting has to stand on its own without the maker of the painting explaining it, describing it, talking about the process. (P6,52,80-81)

Sometimes the artist gets in the way; what the artist says [the artwork is about]. You spend the whole time talking about what they said and not what [the work is] doing. (P13,20,74)

In P7's (20,103) discussion of this problem, he explained that the student/artist's stated explanation could unduly influence how their peers saw the work by directing them as to what they should be looking for rather than what was noticeable to them. And P11 gave a specific example which indicated that she questioned whether such explanations were no more than explanations made by a student/artist after the fact in order to justify what they were presenting; what one instructor referred to in conversation as "bullshit".

Like I had a student last semester who was making these paintings that were just heads, faces. And sort of like [the artist] Janet Warner, but not a good version. Sort of constructed out of her head, made up portraits. They were more like drawings, though; she had no technical ability. They were sort of cartoony like a high school kid, generic, big eyes, what we consider pretty features.

And all semester, even the other students asked "What's this about, why do you keep making the same face over and over again?" And she had this feminist statement, really you know, really wacky. And so I kept pushing her: "Really? Is that really why you're doing this? Like, really? Honestly"? (P11,13,39)

Similarly, P4 considered a reliance on explanations external to the work itself merely indicated weaknesses on the part of the student.

[They'll get to] the point where they're going to start acting professionally as an artist and their work has to start being of a certain quality. . . . You acquire and perfect those skills, that language, until you can articulate these ideas properly, or you don't present it. And no amount of writing or artist statement or arguing is going to change anything. (P4,20,91-93)

5.6 Language and the Crit

To conclude, the theme of language is one that emerged throughout the course of the interviews; participants indicated that critiques are, by their nature, oral exercises.

[Students] role [during critiques] is highly observational, but also, when it really matters they have to be able to talk about why they made the decisions that they made.

(P13,29,145)

Whilst discussing his experiences as an instructor, P14 described a particular design class he had taught called Creative Thinking Strategies, in which language had a key role.

It's really adopting the language . . . that corporations use and bringing it back to designers so that designers can use the same language to interface with the business world. The reason that that's really advantageous to artists is that otherwise artists gain the reputation of being flakey because creativity is based in intuition, and incubation and gestation of ideas, and so we take it for granted. We rely on the fact that the creative process will resolve in some successes. But business people don't trust that, so we look like [pause].

But basically [business people] have the same processes, but they've articulated names for these things [that we haven't]. So I feel that by reverse engineering that, and teaching the designers, when they go out into the real world and interface. Just the simple naming of names; you don't call it "brainstorming" but instead an "idea box". If you call it whatever title [they] give it, the business people will jump on board so much faster. They'll believe you, so then you don't have to go through trying to explain why your ideas are good or why you should be given the time, because they'll trust you because you speak their language.

The special secret handshake. Humans are really easy in some ways; if you can talk their language, you're in. (P14,7,26)

Although the above discussion was about vocabulary in the business world context, a number of comments made by participants revealed that the same could be said of studio art. P4 stated that students needed to learn "the right language to use" and "how to talk about work" (P4,10,34); P10 explained that they had to be able to "articulate [their ideas and methods] verbally" (P10,10,37).

[It's] a question of professional practice. The fact is that students need to know that sometimes the work will need to speak for itself, but there are also ways in which their ability to articulate contextualizes their practice for the professional world of art making. (P12,21,85)

P13's statements were particularly illuminating as he discussed the notion that even within the world of art there are a number of languages that one can encounter, based on ideology.

[There are] also difficulties in language, and if you don't share the terms, or even the beliefs of what these things mean, then the conversation stops.

Like when the student . . . adopts a relativistic position of "you can say whatever you want, I'll say whatever I want, and everything's relative" or "this work means whatever anyone wants it to mean".

[It] creates a difficult scenario [and] reveals the fact that you have to have some common space and belief system that art is merely subjective; that artwork is [pause], there's sort of an assumption. There has to be a shared belief that artworks are worth making and talking about in order to get to [pause]. Once it enters into [the classroom] space, there has to be some sort of shared language system and belief system about what artworks do or can do and the words that we use to talk about it. [You have to] come to the table with [pause] sort of agreed upon standards. You might disagree but you agree to the terms that might be used. (P13,20,76-79)

What these quotes indicate is that language plays an essential part in the professionalization of artists. All these elements – field-specific vocabulary and turns of phrases, terms relating to particular aesthetic ideologies and historical and contemporary knowledge – combine to form P14's "secret handshake" (P14,7,26) which can help make or break a student's education and future success.

The above certainly seemed to be the case during the critique sessions observed. On multiple occasions, I witnessed a particular conversation emerge between two or three

students and often the instructor, that involved particular terminology and historical references that others present seemed to be unfamiliar with. Although such conversations sometimes ended up including the rest of the class, just as often those in attendance simply kept to themselves until the particular line of discussion had ended.

Several instructors I interviewed noted the difficulty some of their students had describing and putting into language their analysis of artworks, yet despite the evident importance of the role of language in various aspects related to the critique, only two participants actually discussed attending to this issue, and only one of these could be described as doing so in any efficacious manner.

Surprisingly, P14, who had brought up the matter of field-specific language as a secret-handshake necessary to gain access to the business community, only mentioned conducting “basic vocabulary exams” which he admitted he didn’t administer very often (P14,23,154).

P1, whose approach was previously discussed in section 5.3.4, was the only one to deal with language in any concrete fashion. As well as wanting to ensure that students stayed attentive to the specific objectives of the assignments at hand, she was also particularly concerned with difficulties experienced by ESL students and specifically targeted the issue of field-specific vocabulary by having guiding questions prominently displayed on the walls of the critique room.

Finally, although only two participants (P13 and P3) specifically included communication skills amongst the criteria they used in assessing students (Q22), many more referred to student participation in critiques. Given that critiques are an oral exercise, it is clear that students’ communication skills will affect how they are assessed.

[We] do group critiques and that’s about assessing them as a student So it’s trying to figure out how they are in terms of participating, gauging how they develop vocabulary from one critique to the next one. So that’s how I assess them as a student. (P4,23,105-106)

[Students are assessed on] they're ability to talk about why they've done what they've done; it's very revealing in the critiques. (P3,22,78)

It helps to round out the individual; to get a sense of how they speak about their work. So that it's not just the student whose work we're looking at. (P3,27,95)

Prelude to Case Studies

Introduction to the Case Study Chapters

In each of the following three case study chapters, I examine one of this research project's fifteen participants. Using a narrative writing style, I focus on my observations of the critiques which they conducted, and how those observations related to the data analysis of their respective interviews. In the process, various themes and issues emerge, and these are discussed in further detail.¹⁴

In order to maintain the narrative quality of these chapters, I have switched from the use of codes to indicate the three principal participants under discussion in favour of pseudonyms. P2 has been given the pseudonym "Ben" in Chapter 6, P12 is referred to as "Kathy" in Chapter 7, and P15 in Chapter 8 is referred to as "James".

¹⁴Unless otherwise noted, quotations in these chapters come from my field notes taken during the critique observations.

Chapter 6: Case Study 1 – Ben (P2)

6.1 A Critique in Autumn

It was the end of November. A typical autumn day, the likes of which one would describe if asked what a typical autumn day was like. Cold, but not freezing; grey, but not rainy; with a pervasive dampness in the air that you can feel just managing to get past the outer layer of your jacket but unable to go any deeper, leaving you with the sensation of being wrapped in a cocoon of your own warmth just thick enough to protect you, though not enough to fool you into thinking you're completely safe from the elements.

The end of November meant end of semester as well, and as I stood outside the building, my hands wrapped around a warm Styrofoam cup of coffee, I could feel the wary busyness of the students around me, and hear the low buzzing of tired excitement; projects to finish, deadlines to meet, excuses to give and final grades to ponder. A few small groups were standing around the front doors smoking and chatting amongst themselves, bundled in scarves and hats, trying to stay close enough to the building to be safe from the occasional gust of wind but not so close as to get told off by security.

I made my way inside, took the elevator and walked down the corridor. No one took any notice of me and I mused to myself that this was the perfect time of year for a stranger to sneak in, looking for an unattended handbag or two. Everyone was too busy, anxious and tired to pay attention. Then again, would a thief have much to find in a place like this? Art students were probably not the best targets; if someone had robbed me when I was a student, they probably wouldn't have found more than a twenty dollar bill and a ten-year old, paint-stained Walkman for their troubles. Then I corrected myself: nowadays they'd at least get a smart phone. I smiled as I walked to the room where Ben had asked me to meet him.

Half an hour later, I was standing amongst a group of students in what felt like a flea market of art. There were about twenty of us, along with Ben. It was a small room; too small for the number of students here, I thought. I could only imagine how crowded it must get when everyone had their supplies and easels set up, trying to get a decent view of the model without knocking into anyone. And it was dark as well; the windows were small, and no one had turned the lights on yet.

A few students were sitting on the floor, but most were standing. Not for lack of chairs, but because they were all piled up against the wall along with paint splattered, skeletal metal easels and battered benches. Everywhere there were paintings. None were particularly big, but they were everywhere. Pinned to the walls, sitting on easels, propped up against workhorses, lying on the floor... Paper, canvas, stretched and un-stretched, scattered about like fallen leaves in vaguely organized piles. The muted fall sun pushed its way through the windows; occasional breaks in the clouds brought puddles of light into the room.

Finally, someone switched on the overhead lights. All the paintings were of similar nudes, which, to anyone not accustomed to the everyday existence of an art department, might have given the scene a slightly surreal, even comical feel. I remembered coming home from class one day, back when I was an undergrad more years ago than I cared to think of. I was living with my best friend, who was studying business, or English lit, or something, and he was watching as I unrolled a bunch of acrylic sketches I'd done in class, all of which were nudes.

"You mean you really sit there in class staring at naked chicks for two hours?" he asked, incredulously. "Yeah", I answered. "And naked guys too. How else do you think we do it? It's not the same thing working from photos; you have to have the thing right in front of you to understand it".

"I don't know how you do it", he said, staring at the pictures. I shrugged and tried to explain. "It's no big deal. It's maybe a bit weird the very first time, but after about twenty minutes you just get into the work, and from then on it's just normal."

He stood silently for a moment, still staring. “I don’t know how you do it”, he repeated, still shaking his head, and went into the kitchen.

6.2 A Small Sketch of the Artist

This was the end of class critique for Ben’s second year observational figure painting class. He’d explained to me ahead of time that the course had consisted of four separate projects, all done from in-class observations of a model, save for a final self-portrait.

In his late fifties with over thirty years of teaching experience – for the most part at the same institution in which we now stood – Ben had spent most of his life painting from observational subjects. Known professionally as a landscape artist, he had studied the history and technical craft of painting in depth, and was knowledgeable enough in human anatomy to be able to explain its intricacies to students in scientific terms, describing not only colour variations and tonal shifts, but also the accumulation of muscle, sinew and bone that lay beneath.

Other than giving private lessons and a few evening courses at a local high school, Ben had been hired primarily on the basis of his portfolio. He acknowledged that the fact that he was known amongst local artists at the time, including those already teaching at this institution, went a long way towards explaining why he was given the job. In his opinion, the art world was a small one, whether it be on the scale of a country or a town, so cronyism was a constant. Though he thought this was the norm, it wasn’t something he was particularly happy with.

Happens all the time. Somebody carrying a friend, giving them a job, and it goes on for thirty- five years like that. They’re old pals, when there were other people around who would have done a better job, and they could have made a move to [change things for the better]. People become entrenched, and then apprehensive about doing things. They just don’t want to bother. (P2,35,170-171)

6.3 The Crit (Part 1)

Ben walked around the room, looking at the paintings spread all around in what at first seemed like barely controlled chaos. Soon I realized that they were actually organized in small groups of three or four pieces; each grouping, I assumed belonging to a particular student. But there was so little room that they were crammed together, some almost on top of each other, jostling for space with the rest of us.

I noticed how most of the pictures were quite similar; the pose of the figure, the background colours and lighting... Various visual cues indicated that these were mostly works done in situ, as a class, assembling in the cramped studio space every week to study together from the same model. The exceptions, I guessed, were the self-portraits that had been their final assignment, a few of which bordered on the abstract.

Ben picked a work off the floor and held it up at arm's length. "Yeah", he said. "This is really nice". He paused. "This is really nice. Do you guys see this?" he said more loudly, still staring at the picture. "The way they've floated the skin tone over that patch of blue shadow under the arm... That's really lovely."

"Who's is this?" He asked the question without turning around. One of the students leaning against the wall at the back of the room answered hesitantly, "Um, that's me". Ben turned to see who had answered. "Who?" he asked. The student raised his hand, and having spotted him, Ben turned back to the painting he still held up in the air in front of him. "I was saying that that's really lovely. Really nice use of colour, and you really get the sense of the light reflecting onto the shadow. Don't know if you used a Filbert brush or..." He turned back towards the student. "Was that... Did you use a Filbert?" The student stumbled "Um...I...I'm not..." Before he'd had a chance to finish, Ben had turned away again, interrupting him. "Anyway, good work there. You guys should have a look at this close up later."

Finally the crit started. Except it really was underway already; I just hadn't noticed. This *was* the critique; Ben talking, staring at pieces, asking a few questions, throwing observations and comments into the air.

“Nice modulation of the brushstrokes here; the lights and darks are solid. See how they stuck to complementaries to bring out the textures?”

“Alex has come a long way; had the classic problem of not paying attention to the background of the picture. There’s got to be a fairness in terms of the importance of background and figure. Good progress.”

He made his way around the room from one group of paintings to the next, and as he moved, the rest of us shifted as well, trying to get a good view without knocking into something or stepping on someone’s work

Amidst the remarks concerning technique, colour and composition, Ben also often included comments regarding student’s participation.

Look at that. Nice work. Good attitude. She comes in at eight thirty and works all the way through. She’s got a wide range of techniques working for her, and she’s a hard worker. The truth is that that drape was just horrible looking to begin with... That pumpkin orange thing...ugh. But that’s what we had. Had to work with what was there, and did a great job. She just needs a bit more time to hone her colours. Still... It’s hard to gain any real level of proficiency in eleven weeks, but she’s done it.

As he spoke, he constantly pointed to one part of a painting and another, indicating specific areas that were of interest, either for their success or their difficulties.

He’s been struggling with the materials, but he’s persistent. He doesn’t let his ego get in the way and he’s been listening... You can tell. He’s much more successful and brave in the later stuff, and you can tell that he’s more confident in what he can do. The balance is really clicking.

The thing I don’t see yet, though; your range of colour is still limited. I think you’re still struggling with the modeling, so keeping the colour simple makes sense. You may want to push it a bit more though; it’ll help give you a wider range of possibilities to actually *create* the modeling you’re finding so elusive.

Though Ben often balanced his negative reactions with positive ones, there were some cases where he found this clearly more difficult. The most notable instance occurred when he stopped in front of a grouping that consisted of two smaller paintings on paper, along with something that looked like little more than a sketch on a torn sketchbook page. “I don’t know...” he said, and paused for what seemed like an uncomfortable moment.

She gives up a bit too easy. The problems she has, she could easily fix on her own, but... I don’t think she comes to class enough. I mean... This is a really thin portfolio; there’s not much here to show.

He stood in silence for another few seconds, then continued

I mean... There are some lovely little passages, but you see the colours here... With the paints you’re using, it’ll never work. I can tell you’re using that cheap stuff, and it’ll never work. The low quality crap never mixes right ‘cause it’s full of other stuff. I’ve told you guys: it’s not pure pigment, so it just mixes into mud. It’s hard enough to learn at the best of times, but if you’re fighting with bad materials too... You need to take yourself more seriously. You pay a lot of money to be here...

Again there was a long pause. “Anyway...” he added as an afterthought that seemed to be more to himself than to the rest of us, and moved on. As he’d been speaking, one of the students near me pulled a Kleenex out of her handbag and started wiping her eyes. I assumed this was the student whose work Ben had just been talking about. After a minute, she stuffed the Kleenex into her pocket and left the room. I didn’t notice whether she ever came back.

6.4 “Give Me The Bad News First, Doctor...”

Later, during the interview, he referred back to the incident described above.

The worst critique I gave was to that girl up there; but I didn’t have anything to work with, but I didn’t have anything nice to say either. I was trying not to be bad, but I didn’t have much to offer her, but I don’t think it’s my fault either; I tried while she was [in

class]. I don't think she's come [to class] enough. I don't know what's going on with her; I'm totally baffled by her. Seems bright enough. Just don't get why she's here.

So that was a [negative] critique. When it undermines a student's confidence.

(P2,31,143)

Ben clearly did not feel that his critiques were particularly negative, but merely factual; he explained that he tried to moderate his comments because of the public nature of the process (P2,33,157). Despite what some might judge to be a rather abrupt attitude, he expressed a strong belief in the importance of encouraging every student, no matter the level of skill. This was contingent, however, on the student demonstrating their willingness to make the necessary effort (P2,32,154-155); a point which he reiterated repeatedly during the interview. The student's role was to be "receptive to the advice given to them. Keep their minds open; not close them and become defensive" (P2,29,132).

Whether positive or negative, however, Ben's critiques were rendered in the same way; mostly talking in the third person about the student while looking at the work. Occasionally he would turn around, look for the student in question and throw a short question or additional comment at them directly. If they wanted to answer, however, they had to do so quickly before Ben was off again, moving on to dissect the next piece.

6.5 The Crit (Part 2)

At the end of the session, Ben turned to the class. "Well, that's it", he said. He thanked everyone for their work and gave a few general words of encouragement. "Was there anyone whose work we didn't see?" he asked. "No? Ok, well I'm around this afternoon and Monday too. If you want to talk more, just come find me."

The students began to pick up their work, chatting amongst themselves quietly. A few went over to Ben to talk. One walked directly over to me; something in his demeanour gave me

the impression that he'd been waiting for the class to end just to approach me. "So...what are you doing?" he asked me, staring at my notebook. "Is this like...an evaluation?"

I briefly explained the nature of my research; how I was a grad student examining how instructors run their critiques. I must have not been particularly clear, because then he asked, "So... Is this like...are you like doing an evaluation of Greg?"

I explained again, emphasizing that this was meant to be an objective examination rather than trying to pass judgements on people. Despite my explanation, it was obvious that this student had something to say. "Well, it's like this all the time. Hours of this. He just loves the sound of his own voice."

Another student walked over; I'd noticed the two of them had spent most of the critique together. One of them had tried to interrupt Ben, wanting to defend part of a work that had just been criticized. Ben had simply interrupted him in turn, and continued what he was saying.

"Remember when critiques meant that students could actually talk?" the newcomer said to me sarcastically. "He asks questions, and then interrupts. He's got his little favourites, too, even when their work isn't any better than anyone else."

I listened, trying to indicate understanding without agreement. It was one of those moments I'd dreaded experiencing as a researcher; having to interact in conversation without expressing a clear opinion one way or another. Ben was only a few yards away, and these two students were right in front of me, staring at me. I measured my words, kept my comments short and noncommittal. Just enough for them to know they were being heard, but not enough to give away a reaction for them to respond to. And if Ben had overheard the conversation, he hopefully could read no more from my response than they could. No one is antagonized, everyone walks away more or less content, and the researcher thanks their lucky stars for such good data.

6.6 Analysis

On the basis of the data I collected, if I had to describe Ben in one word, it would be “confident”. Certain in his knowledge of his particular field of expertise, uncompromising in his beliefs regarding the importance of art and art instruction, and scathing towards the perceived incompetence of government, administration and peers alike, Ben did not mince his words. He assertively defended his pedagogical approach, vigorously fighting against administrative attempts to influence his grading. “My students get good marks” he explained, “and that’s the way it is. If they do the work” (P2,16,74).

The one moment during the interview where I observed his confidence dissipate was when he discussed the student who he had given the negative critique to.

But it’s like that girl. Maybe I’m excusing myself, but it’s kind of beyond me. I try to help them, you know, no matter what; they paid, right? I’m a failure if I can’t help somebody. So I believe [pause]. I had one guy [pause]. He was full of himself; I couldn’t make him budge. And I got pissed off at him and I said “I’m pissed off because I failed myself. I can’t change you. I give you a hard time, I’m sure you want to hit me.”

But in the end I feel like a failure because I couldn’t figure out how to get this guy to come around. Generally I’m ok [with that, but] those are failures; if you don’t really give them something. Whether they’re resisting you or not. But certainly if they’re not; if they’re not keeping you out and you put them down [pause] that’s terrible. You hear it all the time in art. (P2,31,146-148)

Contrary to all of the other participants in this study, Ben only did one group critique per semester: a final crit that was meant to serve as an overview in which all the work produced by the students was presented together and critiqued for the general benefit of the class. Ben’s

opinion was that this was a more effective use of class time, as it allowed him to spend more time with each individual student as they worked (P2,23,109-110).

My methodology is “critique at the moment and in the process of instruction”. So every moment that I give instruction to an individual, it’s a critique of that particular work that’s occurring and the method and the learning that’s occurring Over time I become familiar with that student’s limits . . . at a personal level What I assess is their end point against their start point. So that the objective of the course, or what I want to be satisfied because of the value system to impose a grade, and the actual openness of the individual to progress towards that end, is how I assess them, and I do it on a personal level. Just like I said in the class. And in order not to be unfair to a novice compared to somebody who’s quite developed.

So that’s how I do it: personal level, personal progress, demonstrate the amount of ability to have demonstrated proficiency in what it is I’m teaching. (P2,23,100-103)

Ben was also the only instructor in this research who used the Master critique format in its most basic form. Students had little chance to respond to his comments unless he asked them a question directly, and even then, he often interrupted them before they had had a chance to finish.

The critique I observed was for a course devoted to figurative painting from observation, and therefore fit Ben’s skill set and knowledge base perfectly. For students with little, if any experience in such work, technical skill was undoubtedly what he considered to be the necessary starting point. Unsurprisingly, the works I’d seen fell under the heading of *assignments*, rather than *projects* (see section 4.8). The criteria were specifically technical, and subjectivity of minimal importance; if a student began to speak to issues of meaning and intention, Ben pushed the discussion back onto ones involving technique and skill.

Ben explained that he divided the knowledge necessary to know how to paint into two categories which he referred to respectively as the “objective” and “subjective” elements. Objective knowledge was everything having to do with technical skills, from how to mix paint

and design a pictorial composition, to understanding tonal values and colour balance (P2, 10,39-40). Subjective elements were tied to personal “aesthetic sensibility” (P2,10,42). He argued that both these categories were equally important, and students’ interests and affinities could easily vary on a continuum stretching between the two, but the subjective aspects needed to be built upon the structure created by a student’s proficiency in objective skills.

[My] teaching philosophy [pause]. It’s objective first, but it’s also to encourage subjective development. I mean . . . you [can have] a very intuitive and subjective methodology and approach to an objective subject. So to me that means that I should be useful to that person as well as to the absolutely right down the middle person who wants to learn completely objective [skills].

With oil painting I tell them that it’s fine to be completely objective because you’re developing your own subjective alchemy So being objective and measuring and matching just means [having] a grasp and vocabulary, and later on your life will demonstrate what you’ve got; you’re not going to be a dullard.

So that’s exactly what I mean; I want to take that person, a very subjective person, and still help them get objective value from what’s in front of them while they’re developing their own subjective pathway. And then the other person . . . that’s fine. No difference to me. I work this way here, and that way there. (P2,13,56-63)

6.7 Ideology and Instruction

Clearly Ben’s approach was based on a particular understanding of art and art instruction, one that was predicated upon a strong foundation in technical skills and respect for the instructor’s position as authority in regards to their specific subject matter. His top down, instructor as master attitude was unpopular with some of the students, but effective in as much as he was able to convey a great deal of information during the time span of the critique, using the students’ own work as exemplars. He was one of the few participants to claim to not have difficulty assessing student work. “I don’t have difficulty with it. I don’t.”, he explained. “I look

at it from the ground up, literally from the material that's beneath the painting until the end of the painting" (P2,20,83).

Careful examination of the data revealed some of the underlying beliefs and attitudes that underpinned Ben's teaching. He spoke repeatedly about the importance of artistic "vision" and "purpose" (P2,19,80), and how successful painting had an "integrity" that went beyond the essential technical skills to embody "admirable", "self-evident qualities" (P2, 20, 84). He explained that such works had "universal value" (P2,21,92), tapping into the "essential truth" of the subject under consideration, establishing "a vision that seems both subjectively strong and objectively pleasing to large numbers" (P2,21,93).

His insistence on the value of technical skill was indicative in this anecdote regarding his artistic experiences as a teenager.

When I was thirteen, . . . the first art [exhibition I saw] was a Tom Thompson show; it was great, a lovely show.

The next one was the launch of Pop [Art]. Andy Warhol had empty soup cans stacked up that he'd eaten. And [Claes] Oldenburg was there, [Robert] Rauschenberg. So the big hamburger and the banged together boards. And what else did [the museum] buy [pause]? They bought it all! . . . I was thirteen and I was like . . . It's like "Those friggin' cans look terrible; there's no aesthetic here, this is ridiculous!" And Rauschenberg was banging together boards that he assembled out of garbage wood at a beat reading. So it's like "Yeah, we'll buy it; you're so hip and we're so dumb!" (P2,21,96)

His strong beliefs regarding art and its instruction were based on a lifetime of work, from which he had evolved a way of thinking about his subject matter that he was able to articulate succinctly.

[Philosophically] I'm trying to convert them to a way of thinking [about] drawing, and I'm assessing their ability to reverse what I believe to be the common mindset, and become professional in how they see . . . objectively. And that only relates to the western mindset; it's a post-Renaissance idea. I'm not talking about oriental aesthetics

or oriental concepts in art or drawing; I'm talking about the scientific, humanist type of subject approach that has developed over the centuries through [to] our generation, right from 37000 years ago in the cave, to the post-Renaissance where they truly understand the subject body and subject matter and form.

So that's what I measure in drawing as well is the person's willingness to change from the original common position of being inarticulate to becoming sophisticated and free to express their thoughts immediately. That's the objective. So that their quickness of mind and their unaffected intelligence can transcend distractions and pitfalls. So that they're articulate; they're as good as they can be at whatever it is they're going to do. (P2,23,105-106)

To his dismay, however, he felt that the instruction of objective fine art skills was rapidly disappearing; a problem that he considered endemic in contemporary Western culture, and institutionally widespread.

Ben: [The] student of 2013 has no longer anywhere to go for an objective fine art education in the Western world, and that's troubling.

China. China they still give good instruction. I can't think of anywhere [else] now. It's not Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, the U.K. Scotland has something, but I'm not sure exactly what they're getting. I just don't see it when I look around. So that's my fundamental concern. And no comprehensive programs.

SF: But why is that troubling specifically?

Ben: Because it shouldn't be gone; you should have a choice. It's not either/or. You should have free choice in education. It's absent. A certain ratio of students expect to have an education in the basics, and they don't get it. And their instructors don't have it. The ones who are coming here now currently in the university [pause]. Look at this shit in the halls. It's unbelievable! I mean, who's teaching this course?

So it's eroded to the point that it's generational. . . . To me, it's like, wait a minute, you can go three generations and now you have nobody who even knows how to teach it?

And you don't learn how to teach this from a book. I know that people do, and that's the best they can do, but you can't do anything from a book, really.

So the freedom of an education is lost to political ideology. And that's profoundly disturbing. I can draw and paint. Everybody should have a chance to be educated properly if they want to. It's like saying brain surgery [pause]. Whatever; it's a stupid analogy. That idea that you need to have fine, fine skills and focussed attention to get to the point where somebody [can] trust you to do something. And you basically now have people who can sit around and talk about it and are quite willing to operate on your brain. It's terrible! It's terrible, the stuff down there [in the corridor outside]! Who presents themselves to teach this! (P2,11,46-52)

Clearly, he was exasperated not only with art instruction, but much of contemporary art as well. His final statement on the subject was heart-felt, and like the rest of the interview, unrestrained to the last.

We admire the earliest painting on a cave for real reasons, not bullshit reasons. It's like music to us. For our heads. I have to hear it; I have to see it. I'm hungry! And I'm not satisfied with bad burgers, and I should be upset that I'm getting garbage for food that's always from one source! Fuck! (P2,35,195)

Chapter 7: Case Study 2 – Kathy (P12)

7.1 The Drawing Class

It's almost one in the afternoon, and the room I walk into, coffee in hand, is about as typical an art studio classroom as could be imagined. A dozen or so students are setting up work, talking amongst themselves, and Kathy waves to me as she speaks with one of them. Paint-spattered workhorses are scattered about, along with equally dirty drawing boards and steel-legged plastic chairs piled four or five high in a corner.

Opposite the door, the far wall holds a long line of windows that let in the bright sunlight. A painting instructor friend of mine once pointed out that windows are the blessing and the curse of studio classrooms; on the one hand they let in natural light, on the other hand they take up valuable work space. That's how you know if a department has real money, he explained to me: if you've got the funds, you have them build a room with angled skylights so you don't lose any wall space. In the years since that little observation, I've always noticed it to be true; I've visited private schools which had skylights in their art rooms, but I've only ever seen one university that could say the same.

I grab a chair, take off my jacket and set myself up in a corner. Even though the crit was supposed to start on the hour, I can't help but notice that things seem far from ready. Only a couple of pieces are on the wall, yet Kathy had said this class had almost twenty students in it. I sit patiently, making a quick sketch of the layout of the room for future reference when I sit down to write the notes that I'm now writing on my laptop at home.

Someone has taped a photocopied sheet to the wall advertising a drawing table they want to sell, and another next to it announces an upcoming guest lecture that took place over a month ago. I look at my watch: one fifteen. Kathy is still talking to the same student as a few more people walk in, holding coffees and backpacks and projects. I've put my own coffee down on the floor next to me, but seeing that things are starting to get busy, I pull a small wooden

table closer to my chair to put my cup on it. Like everything else in the room, the table is dirty and flecked with paint, ink and God knows what else. On it lies the assorted bric-a-brac of art-students' everyday lives: broken pencils, a dirty cup (which I push away from me in order to avoid accidentally drinking from it), the odd paintbrush, an abandoned sketchbook...

Am I the only person who's ever noticed that every studio space you walk into seems to contain at least one abandoned sketchbook? One of those books with no name on them that seems to have accumulated a layer of grime on the cover; left there for who knows how long...Maybe it's been there for years, ignored by everyone who glances at it week after week, month after month, year after year, until it becomes practically part of the room, part of its architecture, like a radiator or a light switch; each visitor assuming that it must have been left there by someone in the previous class, or the class before, who'll probably be back any minute now to rescue this precious repository of personal inspiration; delicate sketches of friends and loved ones, meticulous studies and dramatic gesture drawings, poetic musings and fledgling designs for future great works on every page. Except that if you do pick it up and explore its pages, all you find are two or three uninspired scribbles, stick figures with a few bored curves and a half-finished study of a coffee cup that looks like it was crafted by a designer suffering from vertigo. The rest is just a sea of blank pages whose surfaces have never seen the light of day until now.

Finally, almost fifteen minutes later, Kathy makes a move to begin the critique and asks everyone to settle down and make sure they're ready. I count fifteen students, and about as many works, but not quite. "Let's begin, guys", she says. "Let's take a few minutes and just all have a look at people's work." Everyone starts walking around the room, little groups forming and breaking apart, murmuring amongst themselves. I'm surprised to see several paintings on canvas and board, along with a collage and what looks like stretcher bars with torn fabric hanging from them. Off to the side there's some sort of instillation with a fabric covered table and a book sitting on it. I pull the course outline that Kathy emailed me to make sure that I'd remembered correctly; this is supposed to be a third year drawing course.

“What about this?” one of them says laughing, gesturing to a wooden crate with a sandwich on it. “Is this someone’s work?” I’m fairly certain that the comment was meant as a joke, but I notice that she looks around the room and waits a few seconds before moving the crate to the side. Was she waiting for someone to claim their half-eaten lunch, I wonder, or was she waiting to make sure no one spoke up to say it was their project? As I ask myself this, it immediately hits me how strange a question that would be to an outside observer, yet here it seems perfectly normal. I make a note of it, thinking that there’s something there to consider later.

Another ten minutes pass, and a further two students arrive. It’s almost half-past one. Kathy calls for everyone’s attention. “OK, before anything, ----- wants to present her piece. It’s a performance piece, so we’ll do that first.” What follows is a monologue by a student/artist pretending to go through a stranger’s backpack. In it she finds assorted objects, including a sketchbook that she proceeds to leaf through and ridicule before putting it back into the bag. She places it on the floor and stands in silence, expectantly. Assuming, correctly as it happens, that the performance is over, Kathy asks that the backpack be handed around for people to examine.

“Is that your bag?” someone asks the student/artist, who explains that it is. She adds that the sketchbook is hers as well. Kathy says that maybe it would have been interesting had it belonged to someone else, and somebody points out that the bag could really have just been a found object. “That would have been cool” they add.

7.2 Interlude 1: On the “Expanded Medium”

The open-endedness of contemporary approaches to media is a subject that came up during a number of interviews. In several instances, participants indicated that what they identified as their primary medium of interest could actually include almost every other medium they might otherwise have mentioned. Take, for example, P13’s response to the question of how he would describe a medium as apparently clearly definable as painting.

[Like] a lot of other media, there's definitely histories [that painting is] steeped in.

But in terms of contemporary art practice, the tradition is only one part of what we mean when we get to what we're talking about. A painting can be self-identified by a certain type of viscous material on canvas or wood, but it can also be a framework or a set of habits or parameters that might be entirely different medium. . . . Painting is a complicated thing; it's not just oil and canvas, still life. It can be a range of representations, a range of materials, a range of ideologies, so [pause]. (P13,3,10)

Kathy's definition was just as vague:

I would say that the current definitions of painting include material practices that are so diverse as to be nearly unlimited. But typically painting requires a fluid [laughs] of some type. Usually pigmented, but not always. That's about it. (P12,3,12)

P10, the oldest instructor whom I interviewed, with over forty years of teaching under her belt, similarly recognized this particular paradigm.

I identified as a sculptor when I got my [studio art degree] and continue to do so. I've used digital media, video and photography as well. But sculpture in the expanded field has made it possible to use all these media but still understand them as a spatial practice. If sculpture was still identified how it was forty years ago, I'd have a problem using the term. (P10,2,6)

These comments help explain how a critique such as the one described in this chapter, ostensibly for a drawing course, could include works from a range of media far more diverse than what one would traditionally describe as drawing.

Participants also stated that this erasure of traditional distinctions was not without its problems. For example, P7, a photography instructor, explained that the very variety of what could be presented with the same class could lead to difficulties in assessing the works themselves. "[It] goes back to the question: what is a photograph?" he explained.

When you're in the same class and looking at a photograph that was made without a negative – like some formal qualities on a piece of paper – and then the next project you're looking at is a very documentary-style image portrait of somebody and it's so tied to reality. I think going back and forth between these two things [in the same critique] is very difficult. (P7,20,99)

During one of the critique observations, I witnessed the difficulty that this could also bring to students. The critique in question was for a second year drawing course entitled "Approaches to Abstract Image Making" taught by P3. Though the range of media presented was not as open as that of Kathy's critique, it still included many works that would have been described traditionally as painting rather than drawing. One of the students, who explained he had a background in studying Design, asked how it could be that a painting could be considered presentable in a drawing course. P3 directed the question to the rest of the class, but no one seemed to have an answer, until one student offered, "Well lots of stuff can be drawing now. It doesn't just have to be pencil or charcoal. It's, you know, it's mark making. It's more general."

Several of the other students nodded in agreement, but this answer didn't appease the Design expatriate. He seemed embarrassed, and perhaps there was a tinge of exasperation in his voice, but he pushed the question further: if painting could be drawing, he asked, did that mean that drawing could be painting? And if so, then why have separate courses? Was it because each required different skills that needed to be learned, so they obviously weren't the same thing?

Another student began to answer, basically reiterating what had been previously stated. The murmuring within the group began to get louder as some of them began to debate the question amongst themselves. Several were looking at P3 expectantly. "Well, that's a very relevant question" she said with a smile. "And we'll have to think about that as we go along."

When I brought up this incident to her later, I pointed out that it had been an interesting moment to observe. The class had been thrown into disarray by this question, and the students had seemed to me almost embarrassed by the situation. Were they embarrassed because they'd never asked themselves this ostensibly obvious question? Was it because they were

uncomfortable with having a debate erupt so suddenly? How did this issue of “expanded fields” affect teaching?

P3 explained:

I want them to think about those things. Not just using colour because they like colour. Or they like using pencils or watercolours because they “like” them. I want them to think about these things. At some point I really have to be specific as to what is required, but until I have to, if I can keep that question, those questions, open ended, I prefer to do that. And put the responsibility back on them for what they’re doing.
(P3,35,135)

Although I appreciated the point which she was making, I wondered at the time if she had either avoided or misunderstood my question. The almost complete open-endedness of media that I had observed during some of the critiques had clearly been a source of confusion for the student mentioned above, and the fact that none of the other students present could answer him indicated that he was not alone in his confusion, even if he was the only one to express it.

I couldn’t help but think back to the episode during Kathy’s crit with the student who had asked whether a sandwich lying on a table was someone’s work. The anecdote of the cleaner throwing out a piece of contemporary art mistaking it for a pile of garbage, or any variation of the theme, has become a gag so common that it is practically commonplace. We may dismiss it as a hackneyed joke, but the fact remains that there is a kernel of truth imbedded therein whose roots can be traced back to Duchamp’s urinal.

Any object can be considered an art object; we know and accept this, at least for the most part. But does this mean that any medium can therefore be considered to be interchangeable with any other? Can this general statement be applied to the specific? If a urinal can be a piece of art, is it not in part because the definition of art is essentially open-ended? Whereas the definition of a specific medium, however, is something that is generally agreed upon.

For example, the Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines a painting as “a picture that is painted: a picture made by putting paint on a canvas, board, etc.” Compare this to P13’s definition quoted above that “it can also be a framework or a set of habits or parameters that might be entirely different medium” (P13,3,10). This may be a perfectly acceptable definition in the art world, where the fluidity of terminology has little effect on what artists actually do, but in an educational setting, how can this be anything other than a source of intense confusion?

7.3 The Critic’s Circle

After a few questions such as what other objects were in the backpack, and whether the student/artist had put various pins and badges on it for the purpose of the performance, Kathy speaks up again. “OK, now you’re all trained in crit. You’ve done it before. So let’s not do it again. Instead we’ll do something you’ll probably be doing a lot of in your careers; taking critical notes.”

She proceeds to explain how she wants the session to be run. The students will divide into groups of three and examine the works on show. “Look at them as one exhibition” she adds. Then their task is for each group to pick out one work in particular and put down in writing “a description of the formal and thematic elements, then come up with an interpretation of its meanings and concepts”. This is to be done without any input from the work’s creator. When everyone was done, each group would present their interpretation of the work they had chosen, and explain how the formal and material strategies used by the student/artist supported their reading. Only the members of the group would be allowed to talk about the work directly; the role of the rest of the class was to question them on their interpretation, while the student/artist remained silent and took notes.

“You have twenty five minutes then we meet back and discuss” she says. “This exercise is to learn how to make a critical case for a particular reading of a work. You have to make an argument for your decisions, and the rest of us will ask you questions about your reading.” After a pause, she adds “Obviously, we won’t have time to look at everyone’s work”. This

makes sense; there are eighteen students present, and if each group of three is only going to speak about one of the pieces, that means we'll only get through a third of them.

Kathy walks over to me; she wants to take the time while the students are working to do our interview. "This seems like an interesting approach to the critique" I say to her. "Yeah" she answers. "They're so used to the standard crit that it gets kind of boring. This makes them have to think more critically and formulate their ideas more."

"I guess the downside is that you can't do all the work in one session; do you do the critique over several days?"

"Well, yeah, sometimes" she answers, looking around the room to see if everything is going smoothly. "We'll see."

7.4 A description of Kathy

Describing herself as a painter, Kathy has over twenty-five years of teaching experience; at first in private schools and high schools as an un-official, uncertified adjunct, then as adjunct in several post-secondary institutions. She'd been at her current institution, a research-based university, for the last eighteen years, and was currently head of both the departments of Painting and Sculpture.

With an interest in cultural anthropology and the cultural history of image making, she explains that those subjects had more of an influence on her work than her studio art education, of which she remembers little, other than the importance and usefulness of critiques. She expresses regret at not having studied those subjects more closely. "[My] studio degree was a bit of a default", she explained "I was interested in the sciences".

The only participant in this study to openly express satisfaction with her colleagues, describing them as a "fabulous group of people", Kathy also praises her department for its culture of openness, cooperation and "collegial discussion" (P12,16,62-68).

Her main concern, however, is with university administration, and what she considers to be their lack of understanding as to the nature of studio art as a subject.

[Administrators] often talk about creative and critical thinking skills, [yet we have to find] the time to convince them that that is in fact what we teach and that we are capable of instrumentalizing it for students in other programs.

But it takes resources, and we cannot be evaluated on the same outcomes as business students or law students, for example. [Studio art] is essentially a philosophical degree. And as a result, what we have to offer [pause], the economics of the rest of the university need to be provided for, otherwise we can't do it.

That's my biggest concern, is that the bean counters don't know beans. (P12,11,33,-35)

On the subject of assessment, her overall reaction is a negative one.

It's all difficult. . . . Unless they make it clear by blowing off class six times, then it's clear. But actually assessing; there's so many factors. There are as many factors in assessing student work as there are in successes in generating an audience out in the world. And a lot of that is heuristic and unpredictable and [pause] multiform [pause], influenced by a huge variety of factors. It's an art. (P12,26,102)

As discussed in section 3.5, Kathy has a strong belief in the role of professional intuition, a position which she defends by referring to a number of avenues of research in fields outside of studio art instruction such as medical diagnosis. As for her approach to teaching, she expresses that she greatly enjoys her work, and the opportunity for debate and interaction with young artists that it brings her.

[My philosophy is]; be as generous as possible, even if you're wrong.

[Laughs]

I often tell [students]: "I've had very little guidance and my experience may not be what yours will be, but I'm not letting you out of my purview without you knowing everything I know". I just want them to be equipped with everything I have to give them, and I can't

be responsible for the rest of their education, but I can give what I have to give. So even if I'm wrong, I give it anyway. (P12,13,43-46)

[I]t's genuinely a privilege to work with younger artists. I mean no job is one hundred percent love, but this is as close as I can imagine. (P12,35,139)

7.5 The Critic's Circle, cont'd

Once the groups have had the time to make notes and talk amongst themselves about the piece they've selected, we reconvene. The critique progresses roughly as Kathy has requested; each group gives a detailed explanation of their reading of the work, and an account of how they have come to reach it. Kathy occasionally interjects to ask them to elaborate on one point or another; then it's the rest of the class's turn to question the group.

As this is a third year course entitled "Advanced Drawing, there is no talk of project criteria; these are projects, not assignments. I also notice, however, that not once during the whole session does anyone question whether or not they are looking at pieces that could be described as drawings or not.

From the discussions, I can tell that the students are consciously taking into account multiple factors to formulate their ideas. They explore the interplay between title, material and concept, and search for potential cultural and historical references. Smart phones are pulled out of bags and back pockets to look up definitions or try to identify whatever allusions might be imbedded in the work's title, when there is one.

When the rest of class joins in, the group is forced to make their case and defend their previous statements. In the process multiple readings are explored; in one instance, someone brings up how different audiences might have dramatically different readings of the work being discussed, and this opens a whole new avenue for debate.

As they talk, the analysis grows deeper and more detailed. Sometimes it gets to a point where it becomes so elaborate that its relevance is strained to breaking point and the conversation seems to be about something other than the actual work at hand.

One particular piece serves as a case in point. Clearly political in its content, it consists of a large figurative painted mural set up in a corridor outside the classroom with a series of drawings on paper pinned on the opposite wall. The critiquing group begins with a physical description of the qualities of the work, followed by a subjective reading of its meaning based on metaphors gleaned from its figural and narrative elements. As the rest of the class begins to take part, I note that the formal aspects of the work have been quickly abandoned as the discussion becomes entrenched in its specific metaphorical meaning. What seemed like a fairly obvious reading has become more problematic as more people chime in with different opinions, and the very fact that so many different interpretations have emerged becomes a subject for debate in itself. Is this confusion a problem in the work, or is it a strength? Is its ambiguity a mistake, or was it done on purpose?

Eventually the majority of the students seem to come to an agreement about yet another interpretation. It ingrates the smaller drawings across from the larger mural, adding a dimension to the narrative that they find more satisfying.

There is a problem, however, known only to myself and the creator of the work. I assume this to be the case because no one else mentions it, and Kathy actively takes part in the discussion without letting on that she has any hidden knowledge. Seeing him hurriedly taping the sheets of paper to the wall earlier, I had struck up a conversation with him in order to find out how Kathy usually ran her crits. In the process, I had found out that these smaller drawings were preliminary sketches for the mural opposite; he'd decided to put them up so that the class could see the process he'd gone through. Unfortunately, as he had done this at the last minute, almost as an afterthought, no one else knew that these sketches were not actually part of the finished piece itself, and since Kathy had stipulated that the student/artist was not allowed to speak during the discussion of their work, he had had to remain silent. Thus, unbeknownst to

the class, their current reading of the work is skewed by an element that is not meant to be part of the work at all.

7.6 Interlude 2: The Problem of Intentionality

The question of intentionality is one that pervades all aspects of art, from its creation to its reception, and does so both in and out of the classroom. However, the above incident is an example of how intentionality can be particularly problematic in the context of studio art instruction, as it injects an element of profound uncertainty and instability into any discussion regarding one of the essential topics of discussion in the classroom: the meaning of a work.

In section 5.4.2, I indicated that one of the main objectives of the critique was precisely to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the student/artists intentions in a work, along with revealing other potential interpretations. These could often differ dramatically from what the student/artist had set out to communicate. I also dwelt on P4's statement that indicated that an artist may even be incorrect about their own intentions regarding a piece, and only discover some time later what unconscious or semi-conscious influences underpinned its creation.¹⁵ Furthermore, in section 4.6.5 intentionality was listed as one of the criteria on which a number of instructors assessed their students.

An interesting issue regarding intentionality surfaced during my interviews with P9 and P10, who explained that when looking at work by a professional, they assumed that everything in the work was on purpose and nothing was accidental. In the case of student work, however, P10 stated that she was "conscious of the [student's] learning process", and therefore used a more critical lens in her analysis (P10,17,61). P9 echoed this opinion, but also explained a fundamental problem underlying such thinking.

¹⁵As an aside, I myself have always been fascinated by the notion that an artist's stated intentions might actually be a lie; not an error due to a lack of personal insight, but a conscious lie. It seems to me that this is a notion particularly relevant in the context of education, where the student/artist has a direct interest in how successful their work is seen to be, and therefore may well be tempted to create a completely fictional account of the process and ideas underpinning their work in order to impress their instructor. This was indirectly alluded to in section 5.5.5, which discussed how oral explanations given by students were sometimes little more than smokescreens meant to influence how their work was interpreted.

Out in the world, the way that a work is informed is different. [It] might be very trite or very offhand or conceptually informed But if the student does [something similar] you don't know In the case of the student, it may be a time saver to do that; it's a completely different context.

But it also makes it difficult because students see work that might be very offhand and doesn't seem to have much depth to it in a way, and But it's accepted within the art world, so why can't they do it? (P9,17,54)

Essentially, both instructors acknowledged that, when looking at artwork in a professional context, they made an assumption regarding the artist's intention and even technical skill. This presumption of intentionality, however, was not necessarily applied to a student's work. Using P9's example: what might be referred to as an "informal gesture" in a gallery setting may be judged to be laziness in the art class, even if the difference between the two may not be discernible to the viewer of the works in question. P10 alluded to this in her comment about critiques allowing her to ascertain what elements of the work were "chance" and what were "intention"; "how much is just there and how much is understood" (P10,27,101). If one accepts the above position, however, this would essentially mean that there is no intrinsic discernible difference between the artwork of a student and that of a professional; the only distinction being that one was made within the context of an educational institution, and the other not.

Given the above, perhaps the essential problem of intentionality is that it is a question with no answer; there is no right answer, only interpretation. It can be guessed at, theorized, maybe it can even be agreed upon; but that agreed upon interpretation has no more intrinsic or objective truth than the interpretation formulated by one lone individual. I had a sculpture instructor who once who said to us "reality is a matter of consensus", intimating that even our understanding of what constituted "reality" depended mainly on having a strong enough majority of people who agree with each other to then impose their decision upon the rest. If an argument can be made that reality itself is prone to subjectivity and beyond absolute interpretation, then it is not surprising if the meaning of an artwork is even more malleable.

In the case of the previously discussed mural piece in Kathy's critique, the class took at face value that everything they were seeing was intentional; they assumed that the drawings were part of the work. Essentially, they were looking at the work in the same way as they would that of a professional, perhaps because Kathy had said that they should be examining the work as if it were an "exhibition", or perhaps because they, unlike their instructors, made no distinction between the work of a professional and that of a student/artist. The student/artist, for his part, had assumed that his peers would recognize the difference between his preliminary sketches and the finished mural. In any case, he did not have the opportunity to explain anything himself, as per Kathy's instructions. In effect, he had been placed in the position of the professional who is not present in the gallery in order to speak about his or her work.

The problem here is not that the incident took place, but rather that the students were not made aware of it, either at the time or afterwards. Ostensibly, Kathy would not become aware of it either, unless it was revealed to her during a subsequent conversation with the student/artist. At least the student/artist in question probably learned more from this situation than his peers because he at least had all the information. The rest of the class, however, missed out on this opportunity.

7.7 Interlude 3: Critical Thinking

Along with the question of intentionality, I was also struck by how often the notion of critical thinking came up in my interview with Kathy and our conversations during the critique. As previously quoted, Kathy claimed that along with creativity, critical thinking skills were "what we teach", and that the studio arts could instrumentalize such skills for the benefit of non-studio art students (P12,11,33). Furthermore, she described the studio art degree as "essentially a philosophical degree" (P12,11,35).

At the time, her comment had immediately reminded me of something another participant had said to me regarding the pedagogical importance of technical skill.

You have to begin somewhere [and] I do think that those beginnings have to be based in the material, otherwise art drifts too close to being amateur philosophy. And there are too many artists who are pretending to be philosophers, but they're not good at philosophy and they're not good at [pause], they've abandoned the things that make art art. (P14,4,14)

The notions that associations can be made between certain types of art and philosophy and that art making can be linked to certain intellectual skills are not new; I would go so far as to say that they are commonly held beliefs within our culture. Indeed, Kathy's comments seemed to assume that such beliefs were givens. Yet nothing that I witnessed in the critique thus far had indicated that these students were particularly adept, or even aware of, philosophy as a subject. In fact, neither philosophy nor critical thinking were mentioned directly as a topic of conversation during Kathy's critique, nor were the terms to be found in the associated course outline.

This does not mean, however, that I did not witness strong critical thinking skills at work in Kathy's critique. On the contrary, I found that the method she used with her students led to involved discussions that demonstrated a depth and breadth of analysis that I did not often see in the other observations I conducted. Even so, there was no indication as to precisely why this was the case. How exactly had these students developed these skills? Was it simply due to the fact of their participation in critiques? If so, why had I not seen similar results in my other observations? Was Kathy doing something in particular which were particularly beneficial to students learning? Unfortunately nothing in the course outline or the interview pointed to what that might be.

7.8 An Exercise in Democracy

We reach the end of the final critique for the day, and it's clear everyone is glad of it. The discussions have been for the most part lengthy and intense. I feel a certain restlessness in the room.

“Nice job, guys” Kathy says to the class. “That went really well; I think we did good today!”

A few students approach me and ask a few questions about my research; Kathy had introduced me at the beginning of the class, giving them a vague description of what I was doing, and they were curious to know a bit more. I take the opportunity to comment on how well the critique had seemed to go, and they enthusiastically agree. Then I add that it’s a shame there isn’t more time to discuss everyone’s work. “Yeah” one of them answers, “that’s how it always is; we never get through more than half of the work.”

Just then, Kathy calls out again to everyone. “Now I know we were planning to use the final class next week to go play paint-ball” she says. “But obviously we didn’t have time to crit everyone’s work today. So I’m leaving it up to you; we can do that, or come back here and we’ll do a final crit of the rest of the work”. She pauses, then adds, “it’s your call.”

The room falls silent; a few students are still talking amongst themselves, and others are looking around at each other. No one answers.

In the end, Kathy decides to put it to a vote. No one votes to do the critique; they choose to go play paint-ball instead.

Chapter 8: Case Study 3- James (P15)

8.1 The Studio

Directly after the critique, we go to James' studio, which is only ten minutes away from the fine arts building. It's the last week of April, and still a bit cold, but it's a sunny day which makes the walk a refreshing one, especially after having spent almost three hours in a classroom. As we make our way over, he talks of various things: department policies, his upcoming exhibition, the difficulties of running crits with international students... He's a busy guy in his early thirties with a dozen irons in the fire and at times I find it hard to keep up. No sooner has he said something which I try to slot somewhere in my mental file folder, hoping not to forget it, that he's on to something else, or asking me my opinion.

Just walking with him feels like I'm already in the middle of the interview and part of me wishes I had my notebook in hand to write as we go, but I don't want to look like a reporter, or make him feel uncomfortable in public, or fall on my face because I'm not looking where I'm going. Some part of my brain, the part that's not trying to focus on something he just said or on putting my left foot in front of my right one, wishes I had a state-of-the-art microphone so I could just record all of this.

He unlocks the door and we walk into a studio which must be six times the size of my apartment, and with a ceiling twice as high. It's a converted warehouse (all the best studios are!) which he shares with another faculty member. Their respective work areas are separated by temporary plasterboard walls that only go half way up, leaving a sense of expansive space despite the division. Light streams in from the windows that run along the length of one of the walls about three quarters of the way up. Despite the ventilation ducts and an open window, the warm, slightly acrid smell of oil paint drifts on the air, enticingly tempting and toxic.

In a corner, James has set up what looks like a makeshift living room: a couple of old couches surround a battered coffee table sitting on a slightly ratty carpet. Not far away there

are several shelves full of books; his personal library from which he makes a weekly selection to take over to his classes for students to leaf through.

Part of me wants to have a closer look at them. I've often heard say that you can tell a lot about someone by the books they keep on their shelves; does that even still apply, I wonder? If people read less and less – and I'm not talking about poorly written online blogs and skimming already abbreviated web articles – what does that mean for those aforementioned shelves? If adults, who used to read books in their younger days, claim to no longer have the time (and I'm one of them), and children and teenagers increasingly rarely read actual books at all (and no, that's not a myth; ask anyone who teaches and talks to their students), does that mean that eventually we'll be a culture of individuals whose bookshelves are bare? What will the above adage reveal about us then? Will we need to replace it with 'You can tell a lot about someone by their Facebook page'? If so, no one will know anything much about me, and some of what they think they know will have been made up...

On the opposite wall hang several large canvases, each more than six or seven feet long on any side, all apparently works in progress. Lying on the floor beneath are plastic tarps and bed sheets with large tubes of paint and brushes and cans and paint knives more or less neatly scattered about. More canvases are propped one on top of the other in corners and against baseboards, some finished, some, not.

James ushers me over to one of the couches and invites me to sit down while he makes us a cup of tea. I'd rather go look through his canvases and rummage through his art materials to be honest. But instead I put aside my artistic curiosity in favour of my academic one, sit down and take out my pen, notebook and digital recorder.

8.2 Portrait of the Artist as a Young Teacher

In his early 30s, James is one of those people for whom the term "renaissance man" seems to have been coined. With interests ranging from choir and martial arts to football and

art history, he is a primarily self-taught painter with a continuing practice of gallery exhibitions which he actively pursues alongside his post-secondary teaching.

Early in his undergraduate career, he decided to take classes in art education. His love of art and art making was self-motivated, and had emerged at a young age, but, as he admits himself, “it never clicked [that I could be] an artist: I wanted to be a teacher. I can’t talk about art without talking about teaching” (P15,1,50). His interests were so wide ranging, however, that he found the art education curriculum too restrictive. “I was taking classes because I loved what was being offered, not moving towards a specific degree” (P15,1,41), he explains, which led him to graduate with majors in both studio art and psychology.

He then spent two years teaching himself to paint.

[T]aking the rudimentary things I got in undergrad about painting; the basics of..the knife, what mediums are..and pushing that much further. I went through art history from Rembrandt up to the Impressionists and everything between and just worked in a way that tried to replicate the techniques of how they did what they did. Until I got to a point where I felt confident enough that I could simulate what they did.

I mean, I wasn’t working to be a forger, but I wanted to understand what they understood. Understand the process too, not just being able to slap paint on like an Impressionist, but understand that you need a filbert brush they’re using to get rounded edges, or Berthe Morisot in particular crowded things in light pink or baby blues that led to a nice light brown to activate on top of it. Those things were very informative to understand.

And then I skipped over a lot of abstract impressionist stuff . . . [laughs] and jumped back into the figurative arts with Lucian Freud and [Francis] Bacon and tried to understand what they did, and leaning technical things like how Lucian Freud uses Cremnitz white that’s even heavier than Flake white and drags the brush through in very particular ways. So that was most of my education in paint; taking things that I knew about values and composition and scale from drawing. (P15,1,44-49)

Afterwards, he applied to a graduate studio arts program, “still wanting to teach, but at the university level; still at this time never conceiving of art as a career” (P15,1,50). Graduate school would eventually lead him to several more tangential opportunities before eventually landing him his current position.

Now I have the teaching job; that’s the new venture. Because here you’re not just a teacher who makes art; you’re not a teacher that used to make art. You’re an artist who teaches. That’s highly encouraged in the university and supported through funding and space and so now I have a different type of freedom to teach and to be experimental and to continue developing those skills, while being supported to be an artist with the backing of the institution, so it’s a new venture where I’m learning new things in both fronts. (P15,1,66)

8.3 James’ Teaching: Intentionality and Awareness

James’ approach to teaching is perhaps best described as student-centered, but in a way that goes beyond the usual simplistic platitudes that are often associated with the term. He places high expectations on both himself as an instructor and his students as well. Not only must the instructor endeavour to analyze their students’ actions and motivations through their artwork and presentations, but their thought processes also need to be understood and influenced.

Doing so is far from easy, however, due to the wide variety of students that can be found within a single classroom. “Students come in all different types of combinations of things”, he explains.

[Some] are hyper-developed by the time you get them; it could be spatially, or technically, in thought development, in intensity. These are things that they’ve forged over years of doing it actively or passively. And when they get to you, they’re at a certain place. [They’re] like sharks; they know what they do well and they can perform and jump through the hoops you give them. Especially in entry level courses.

The difficulty with them is creating an environment, a competitive energy that gets them to not settle on that skill or that proclivity, and to get them to challenge themselves. They're also the kinds of people who have always gotten the pats on the back, so it's a very fearful place to push beyond those safety zones. (P15,26,278)

On the other hand, he continues, there are the students who haven't developed such confidence yet.

[With] them, the challenge is encouraging them to feel that what they're doing – their direction – has value. Especially in comparison to the other students I mentioned. And then trying to reinforce behaviours that in time will lead them to the types of success they want to achieve. (P15,26,279)

Even this single possible disparity between students is the source of a great deal of difficulty in terms of assessing students, especially for an instructor who is just beginning to teach.

If work isn't good, if work isn't operating at a level that you feel the whole class is working at, for people that might not have thought about these types of things, the question might come up; why is that student not working? Are they not talented? Are they lazy? All these types of things can become confusing [when you're] trying to see what's happening with that student. So for me it's trying to recognize where that student is at.

And if the work is working well; what's contributing to it working well? If it's not working well, what's contributing to that? And with those two type of students in mind, what advice to give to help them grow, and how to evaluate those students as they grow.

I'm speaking in general [terms] because there's no single rule; it's just keeping all that working knowledge going on and trying to stay flexible. (P15,26,280)

As for his students, he expects them to learn to be observant, self-aware, critical and engaged. Throughout the interview, James discusses the importance of technical skills as well

as professional ones such as presentation and a capacity to communicate both orally and in writing. Most importantly, however, students need to have self-motivation; “To be hungry; to be agent; to be active” (P15,14,209). This motivation, however, cannot stem from grades, which he deems to have little purpose other than either as an institutional tool or a motivational one (P15,14,198).

When they’re operating at a high level, especially at the upper levels, hopefully as soon as they can, but as they move on, their criteria for success is something else, something internal. Something someone can’t tell you. And I think some of them have already taken that and ran with it. They’re not worried about the grades. (P15,14,208)

His emphasis on student awareness and intentionality stem from his belief that it is the artist him or herself that has become the essential subject of contemporary art. The quintessential example of this, in his opinion, is a piece by Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic entitled *The Artist Is Present*, in which the artist sits, immobile, while spectators are invited to take turns sitting opposite her.

There was a recent book published called “100 Works That Will Define Our Age”; it just came out a couple of months ago. Number one in the book was [Marina] Abramovic’s “Artist is present”, and I agree with that, and I’ll tell you why.

The best that we can really say and teach or talk about in a more holistic way is how present the artist is in the making of their work. Either actively present, or consciously absent.

As in [Jeff] Koons who’s omnipresent and yet not there at all, to [Marina] Abramovic who is present in the gallery and you’re just staring at her and you’re getting all of her attention, as much as she would as a painter give every square inch of that canvas, even if just a dot is put on there, it’s all been considered to a certain degree. . . . And in that sense, her expression is Art in its most pure and direct form as we would want to say is good. (P15,11,164-171)

But to expect students to be able to live up to such expectations right from the start, he explains, is unrealistic; James was one of the participants discussed in section 4.4.2 who believed that the secondary school system taught them to be risk-averse, stifling any inclination they might have towards experimentation and discovery.

I encourage failure, and the system that they're coming from does not. [It's] definitely all about forward momentum, and pushing them through and all these types of systems that sometimes have nothing to do with their actual education. (P15,0,18)

He therefore expresses the belief that the essential role of the instructor, especially during the early years of the undergraduate degree, is to teach specific ways of thinking and acting, or, to use his own preferred term, teaching "through behaviours" (P15,21,233).

"Everything I do", he explains, "whether it's incremental or technical, or philosophical discussions . . . , is helping to guide the student towards autonomy. My job is best achieved when you don't need me anymore except for a letter of recommendation" (P15,0,26). To accomplish this, James focuses on teaching specific behaviours which he believes are an inherent part of art making, and as such can be applied to any medium, as well as more widely in other areas of one's life.

[It] doesn't matter if it's ballpoint pen, or photography or computer, or paint. Setting up behaviours of inquiry, of practice, of Socratic debate [is what's] going to lead them to their own answers rather than some synthetic solution. (P15,0,29)

When you become a designer for example and you get plopped in front of a computer, will you have the encouragement and fortitude to challenge that media and not use it like the person next to you? Think through the computer like you'd push through charcoal, or ball point pen or something else to somewhere where you didn't know it was going to go. (P15,0,28)

In the case of this particular class, the immediate subject was drawing, but he explains that, as these behaviours are applicable in a much wider sense, the medium essentially serves as a metaphor what he is striving to teach (P15,0,8-9).

As mentioned above, encouraging experimentation is part of his approach. But just as important, if not more so, is an overall sense of criticality; an instinctive urge to “observe, analyze, synthesize and interpret” (P15,10,138).

So even at this level, I hope that when they’ve left here I hope they have the basics, the foundation to be critical and build on their experiences to get smarter, better, stronger, faster – whatever it is. (P15,0,26)

He is also adamant that students need to develop an awareness of what they are trying to accomplish through their work and how these goals fit into historical and contemporary culture.

It’s like “Is that art appropriate for the genre you’re trying to speak to”.

If it’s a class for rendering a body in space on a stool, does it do it? If it’s supposed to be a kind of slacker aesthetic that has a west-coast leaning of kind of collage, find object, material, heavy, abject, process based, sculpture with feminist leanings, does it achieve that? Is it speaking to that?

If it’s low brow south-west tattoo culture; are you doing work that would sit within that genre well or push against it in an interesting and unique way?

That’s what we’re dealing with; intentionality and presence. And the media, the format; that’s important, but definitely de-emphasized [in order to focus on] intentionality and presence. (P15,11,173)

In order for this to occur, however, he emphasizes that, as an instructor, it is necessary to be aware of each student as an individual, and put aside one’s ego. Personal interests and aesthetic preferences must be bracketed so that the individual student’s goals can be identified and encouraged.

Of course it’s also part of my job to [help them] articulate [their goals] if they don’t know what [they are]. And those things might be very much not like what I do, or even what I value. And that’s ok. And I don’t know if every professor says that to themselves

or out loud, but I think that's important; it's not about me, it's not about ego, it's not about perpetuating a certain way of making or thinking or doing, but to perpetuate the fact that people do make, think and do, at least. (P15,174-175)

This self-control on the part of the instructor also involves being capable of taking a back seat to what is happening during discussions and allowing students the freedom to take charge of the proceedings and create their own dynamic.

I want them to want to do it. And that's something I've had to learn; to balance my eagerness. I can't want it more than them. If they smell that, it diminishes their energy sometimes; you're too intense for them. So you have to hang back and give them the platform in which to push out on. And I hope that was reflected in the critique, that they felt that they had a right to speak and they didn't need my permission; you didn't see hands go up! (P15,23,272)

By consciously removing himself from active participation, he also gives himself the opportunity to focus his attention on the quality of their interaction and be, as he put it, "critical of their criticality" (P15,23,270).

Finally, James also talks about the importance he attributes to making sure that his classroom is a "safe space" (P15,21,244). This was a term also used by P1 in her discussion about her use of guiding questions and language in the critique (see 5.3.4).

But unlike P1, for whom the importance was to create what might be described as an emotionally "safe" space – an atmosphere in which students would be comfortable discussing works that were "really personal" (P1,32,175) – James' goal seems to be more about creating an intellectually "safe" atmosphere; one in which they could "feel comfortable, secure, encouraged and valued" (P15,21,238), free to make mistakes, and free to explore any subject matter whatsoever, whether it be emotionally loaded or potentially difficult in any other way. "The pushing of the boundaries is [what's] important", he explains "whatever those boundaries are" (P15,21,244).

8.4 Teaching the Critique

James considers the critique to be essential to studio art pedagogy, describing it as “the main forum for [student] evaluation”.

It’s also the arena for other types of professional experiences; from receiving feedback, giving feedback, presenting one’s work professionally, articulating themselves, either prior to the work, in defence of the work or in expanding on things that someone else has said. All of that is super important because everything is present; their thinking process, their practice made visible through the products they present, they’re maturity. All of it is laid bare in a space like that. (P15,27,283-286)

What was most striking was the approach I had watched him take to the critique that morning; though its format was that of a conventional crit, with the student/artist presenting the work orally followed by a group discussion and ending with some closing remarks by James himself, its content was much more out of the ordinary.

James had started with an overview of what was expected of the class that day; the description of which he gave to me during the interview was almost exactly what I had observed.

I opened up [with] a brief review of different parts of a critique and how to go about it in a way that gives some structure to your own criticism of making observations and analyzing these things, and synthesizing what you’re seeing in the work or within the person’s history, or art history, or design history. And then arriving at some interpretation. (P15,0,11)

As these were assignments, he then went on to ask them to review what the particular parameters had been for the works on display. As he explained, not only did this help to remind students what aspects of the work they should be focussing on during the critique, it also emphasized what it was that he himself would be looking to evaluate (P15,14,212).

I had observed P4 do something similar; before starting on the critique, he had purposefully assembled all the students in a separate room adjoining the woodshop (“So that they’re not distracted by their surroundings”, he’d explained to me) in order to review what they had accomplished in the previous week’s class and what the day’s goals and expectations were. Like James, he had reminded them of the assignment parameters, but had also explained how the day’s events fit into the overall structure of the course.

This regular review of previous and future learning objectives was something I myself was taught to do at the beginning and end of every class when I was preparing to teach my first undergraduate course. In James’s case, however, he was not only repeating previously discussed information, but also pushing his students to think about both what they were about to do – a critique – and also how they might accomplish this.

Nor was this approach relegated to the introduction of the day’s class; James would regularly draw attention to part of an exchange between two students, or the way the class had reacted to a comment that someone had made. At other times, he would have them focus on something one of their peers had just said, and ask them what specific factors might have influenced a specific choice of words or a particular interpretation.

His goal, he later explains to me, is not only to give students the opportunity to listen to criticism of their work, but also to understand “what criticism [is] about”.

[And] that people critique sometimes benignly or maliciously from their own aesthetic. And how to navigate the suggestions; when to listen, when to move in the opposite direction and all that kind of fun stuff. (P15,1,58)

A metaphor which he uses in class to explain how the critique should go beyond the work itself was that of academic research – specifically that of Art History.

I bring in books every Tuesday and we look through art and design books and we all talk. You know, first thing that art historians do, though I’m no art historian, they want to know who published it, where it’s been published, where are the footnotes; it’s a whole vetting system before even getting to the content. To understand the author’s position,

or pedigree, or whatever they're looking for. So we have these conversations about that level of critique. (P15,0,20-22)

Instilling students with a capacity for self-reflection and self-awareness is an objective which James compares with what he believes is experienced by undergraduates in art education

I think it allows [my students] to step back from the experience, and almost become like art ed. students who need to step back from the classroom and watch what's going on between the teacher and the students. And I think that getting all students to do that is very worthwhile and helpful because it also fits into the notion of critical thinking and self-reflectivity and all that kind of stuff. (P15,0,33)

This belief is in part due to his own experiences as an art education undergraduate, which included conducting observations of art teachers working in middle and high schools.

I began actively watching my professors in graduate school with the understanding that I would want to at first teach K-12 and then ultimately teach university; so those types of observational studies became very important as well as the classroom experiences. (P15,5,94)

In addition, he also acknowledges his martial arts training as playing a role in this approach.

In that particular context [martial arts], you're awareness of yourself as a student is not something that you just experience like you're K-12 or elementary experience, but it's something you're very conscious of.

You go to a very particular place with a particular group of people, at a very particular time of day, for a particular subject, in a very particular way, so you're very conscious of yourself as the student, and the role [someone else is] playing as master or instructor. Those things are very clear. And so the potential to observe instruction in a very conscious way for me was more fore fronted. (P15,5,84-85)

Describing the effect of his art education and martial arts experiences, James explains that they both taught him to be constantly aware of “how I’m consuming the world in my experiences; how I’m affecting others and how others affect me” (P15,5,88). “Teaching begins with learning how to be a student” (P15,5,83), James states. And the key to being a successful student is to learn to be an “active student” (P15,5,88); one who is observant not only of what is being taught, but also how it is being taught.

The direct observable result of James’ approach was a critique that moved swiftly and with little wasted time. Students rarely asked questions directly of the student/artist, but rather described what they saw, whether the assignment criteria were being addressed and in what way, how they interpreted the work and what led them to such interpretations. Occasional suggestions regarding possible formal decisions that could be adopted or abandoned were also included, and all of this was communicated in a generally respectful and considered fashion. The intensity and enthusiasm of the group was such that when James left the room for several minutes in order to speak to a colleague, he felt no need to inform the class that he was leaving; the discussion simply continued unabated without him.

8.5 Concluding Thoughts: “I’m Batman”

From speaking to him at length and observing him at work in the classroom, it is clear that much of James’ approach to teaching in general, and the critique in particular, is linked to his own experiences and interests: whether personal, professional, or artistic. His interview was punctuated with references to music, martial arts, his parents, his education, working at a video store, art history, sports, politics; even American Idol and the Karate Kid movies of the 1980s. All of these references served as metaphors, analogies and points of comparison for a teaching philosophy based on his own mindset as well as his observations regarding contemporary society and its culture.

James is aware that, in the critique, the instructor can play any number of different roles depending on the situation, the group dynamic and the particular student/artist; an observation which leads to yet another amusing cultural reference.

But at all levels, I'm Batman. You saw [the movie] The Dark Knight? I'm what they need me to be; I'm not the good guy, I'm not the bad guy. I'm what they need me to be. I poke, I prod, and I can be the devil's advocate, the voice of reason, the one that brings the conversation back on focus. So I really try to maintain that kind of role; let them flex their voices, their muscles. It's necessary for them to do and for me to see [in order for me to] evaluate. (P15,29,331)

From the analysis of the data I assembled, I would argue that the essential element that he seeks to instill in his students is critical thinking; in order to achieve this, it is necessary that they adopt a mindset of constant analysis of everything around them, an attribute which he plainly recognizes in himself.

If I had a talent, then that talent isn't just putting paint on a surface; it's in an ability to recognize systems. I'm not always right, but it's an acuity to recognize systems, to try to understand how those systems are operating within other systems, and then an ability and a want to manipulate those systems. And that could be applied to painting, to understand colour, [understanding] how other people perceive space because I need to be able to conceptualize what they see. . . . All these types of things are at play, and keeping all that information in your mind becomes habit; we do it when we walk, which is just controlled falling.

Artists are discovering some new things; a lot of things they're re-discovering. . . . Socrates, Aristotle, they knew about atoms way before they proved it. And so a lot of stuff we do now is trying to name out and parcel out the systems we've all been participating in for the longest time but maybe not having the language to speak about these things.

So I guess the understanding of systems is something that I emphasize in my courses. And that can be applied to cultural systems, and at heart my work is very activist, so I'm always thinking about systems [pause]. What was the question? [laughs] (P15,27,291-300)

"Deploying pedagogy", he explains "is not just telling students to do something, but helping them understand why."

How is it going to affect what they're going to do; what can they learn through the understanding of it, and give them the tools not to sell them on something, but to have more knowledge in which to start to shape their own experience through the information that's provided, to help them to at least start peering behind the curtain to understand why these systems are in place and how they are effected and how they affect. (P15,5,92)

To be "present", to have "intentionality", both as artists and students, requires self-awareness and a capacity for critical thought. Nowhere was this more markedly visible than in his approach to the critique. James' critique not only looks at the work and the students who produce it, but also those who are doing the analysis, and the methods that are used to reach those analyses. All participants are pushed to reflect on their thought and decision making processes no matter what role they are playing, and the critique itself is explored as a set of methods of analyses; a meta-critique, if you will.

"The process is our focus, not the product", James told the class at one point. Indeed, the students' work, ostensibly the focus of the critique, ends up taking second place to the students themselves. The pieces they present, as James described so entertainingly in section 4.9, is "poop"; the bi-product of the students' thinking and their actions. They are the result of what the students "ingest": what they've learned in terms of technique, what they read, what they've discussed, what exhibitions they've attended, what they're thinking about, etc. They are an indicator, though not the sole one, of the student's learning.

It was also clear, however, that it was not merely the process behind the work that was being examined, but also that of the critique itself. And, given that everything regarding process essentially stemmed from the students themselves, he could have just as easily stated that it was they who were the focus of their own analysis.

Chapter 9: Findings

In this chapter I give an overview of this research's salient findings concerning assessment and the critique. I then go on to elaborate upon two specific findings at greater length; firstly, the effect of personal ideology on teaching and assessment, and secondly, the tendency demonstrated by many participants to assume that learning objectives can be reached in a tacit fashion and simply through the process of taking part in studio critiques.

9.1 Uncertainty, Art and Assessment

Generally speaking, there was little indication that participants had any difficulties teaching their subject; the process of instruction was something that they enjoyed, along with the resulting relationships that were built between themselves and their students. A variety of comments were made, however, which recognized the essentially abstruse, open-ended and anarchic nature of art. "Ambiguous" (P9,42,137), "compulsive", "irrational" (P12,2,8-10) and "flakey" (P14,32,204-205) were only some of the adjectives participants used to describe the art-making process.

For students, the particularities of the subject could lead to difficulty. The emphasis on experimentation and such counter-intuitive notions as learning through failure were aspects of art instruction that instructors explained their students found difficult to navigate. Similarly, it was expressed that the idea that a given problem may have multiple possible answers, or even that there may be no right or wrong answers at all, created an instructional atmosphere of uncertainty and risk-taking which students were often ill prepared for by their previous educational experiences.

For instructors, this ambiguity was understood as part and parcel of the very nature of art making. Its effect on the pedagogical act of assessment, however, was much more

problematic, making this a subject rife with uncertainty and confusion. Viewed almost universally in a negative light by participants, at best it was considered stressful, problematic, and time consuming, and at worst futile. As noted above, this may well be simply because the subject of art is by nature nebulous. However the situation is surely not helped by the general lack of training in pedagogical theory and practices expressed by participants, nor by the lack of structured, systematic feedback that was described within many of their respective departments; findings which corroborate claims made by Barrett (1988), Carroll (2006), Lavender (2003), Salazar (2013b), and Shreeve, et al. (2010).

The majority considered assessment to be a matter of quantification, and therefore counter to the qualitative nature of the subject matter at hand. Grading, perhaps the ultimate form of quantification, was not surprisingly greeted with the most distrust, scorn and anxiety. Considered little more than a nuisance and hindrance, participants also worried that students' fixation on grades could be detrimental to their learning.

Problematically, the only real value of grading that was expressed was its use as a motivational tool, either as encouragement or to prompt greater effort. Such an instrumental use of grading, however, runs counter to the notion that a grade is meant as an indicator of present student performance, as opposed to their potential performance. More practically, unless it is made explicit to students that there is a motivational factor involved in the grade they receive, what guarantee is there that they will have the necessary awareness to change their behaviour as a result? On the contrary, the consequence of this use of grading could easily be the opposite of what the instructor had intended; a weak student may feel complacent if given an inflated assessment, whilst a strong student may be discouraged by a grade that is lower than they deserved.

There was also confusion amongst several participants due to the fluidity that was seen to exist between teaching, assessment, feedback and critique within studio art instruction. Unlike many other subjects where periods of instruction are usually separate from moments of assessment, in studio art the lines between the two are often blurred. This, I would suggest, is more due to the particular characteristics of the field's pedagogy than due to any fault or lack

of training on the instructors' behalf. Studio classroom instruction tends to include lectures, demonstrations and one-on-one critiques. Both the one-on-one critiques as well as the group critiques involve instruction in the form of feedback, and these contribute to assessment. Group critiques have further complications, as discussed below.

Furthermore, professional intuition was undeniably recognized as playing a role in assessment, despite its unquantifiable nature. The subject was brought up by more than half of participants, all of whom expressed confidence in the instinctive judgments they made based on their artistic and academic experience. It was also admitted, however, that their intuitive assessments sometimes conflicted with the result of rubric-based criteria. In reaction to this, some claimed to include their intuition within the criteria they used, whilst others adjusted the percentages they allocated to criteria after the fact in order to more closely mirror their instinct.

Finally there was ambivalence regarding the relationship between the student and their work, and how this relationship affected the process of assessment. Though there may be no direct correlation to be made between the two – for example, poor work might not be indicative of a poor student, nor good work indicative of a strong one – interview data indicated that there was a great deal of variation and confusion amongst participants as to whether they made any distinction between the assessment of the student and the assessment of their work. Some instructors claimed to focus on the work, others on the student. Several seemed to change their minds as they formulated their answers, and still others made claims that seemed to be contradicted by their answers to other questions.

9.2 The Ambiguity of the Critique

Participants clearly supported the literature in expressing a shared belief in the central role played by critiques in studio instruction, and the majority specifically referred to its importance in the assessment process.

It would seem that, since Barrett's (1988) study, art instructors have expanded the way they understand and conduct critiques. Indeed, the variety of different approaches and opinions expressed by participants of the present research indicates that they have come to adopt some of the very suggestions that Barrett recommended almost thirty years ago. Additionally, whereas the participants in his 1988 study considered the principal goal of the critique was "the evaluation of student art work" (p. 25), those of his subsequent research conducted in 2000 indicated a greater emphasis on feedback rather than judgement. Similarly, my own research's participants included both evaluation and feedback amongst critique objectives, while more closely matching recent theoretical literature in the field by also emphasizing the critique's role as a forum for community building and professionalization.

Successful critiques were often described as one of the greatest sources of professional and personal satisfaction for participants, as well as essential opportunities for student learning; ensuing discussions left those involved motivated and engaged, with a greater understanding of the formal and critical aspects of the work in question. However, it was also very clear that the critique was often a source of frustration and prone to ambiguity. Tiring, time-consuming, frustrating; the experience of the critique could be just as disastrous as it might be positive, and this for both instructor and student. Participants corroborated many of the negative aspects of critiques identified by authors such as Blair (2006), Barrett (2000), Klebesadel (2006), Percy(2006),and Shreeve, Sims and Trowler (2010), amongst others. Its communal nature and the personal investment that students could have in the work they presented were pointed out as giving rise to a variety of problems having to do with issues of social interaction and power dynamics.

9.2.1 Critique objectives. Data in this study revealed that participants considered the critique to have multiple objectives: it allowed students to receive feedback from peers and instructors (5.4.1) and it helped students form a strong community of peers as well as introducing them to a wider community of practice (5.4.3), the latter of which was emphasized through a number of professionalizing objectives (5.4.4). Finally, critiques revealed

intentionality and latent content which fed into assessment (5.4.2). This list of objectives generally coincides with those expressed in the literature as described in Chapter 2; however, evidence that these declared objectives were actually being put into practice was not always apparent.

The first two objectives – receiving feedback and building community – were unambiguous and could be overtly observed. The third objective – professionalization – was more problematic. Participants indicated that critiques helped in the professionalization of students by teaching them a number of skills. These were: how to physically present their work professionally, language/communication skills, how to critique work (critique proficiency), and critical thinking skills. However, my findings mirrored those of Kushins (2007) inasmuch as there was little concrete evidence that three of these four skills were actually being taught, with the exception of P15 and, in the case of language, P1. Only the first of these skills, how to best physically present work, was a subject that I witnessed being discussed explicitly during most critiques.

Finally, the fourth objective mentioned almost unanimously was that of assessment. Indeed, some participants identified the critique as the main method of assessment in studio art instruction in great part due to the role that it played in understanding the thinking and working processes of student/artists through the revealing of intentionality and latent content. However, a number of findings make it necessary to strongly question this assertion, and these will be further discussed in section 10.4 of the next chapter.

9.3 Ideology and Assessment

A further issue which arose during the course of this research was that of ideology. In the case study chapter focussing on P2, it was evident that his particular beliefs regarding art in general and its teaching in particular had a strong influence on his approach to what took place in the classroom. In his interview, he spoke of artistic “vision” and “purpose” (P2,19,80), as well as describing how successful work embodied the “essential truth” of its subject and held

“universal value” (P2,21,92). P2’s ideological leanings could be witnessed in his actions as well; his use of the Master critique, with its top down learning and emphasis on instructor authority can be seen as a direct result of these beliefs.

Such an approach, however, is not generally well received in contemporary academic circles, associated as it is with Modernist philosophies of art. Indeed, two instances occurred during other interviews which caught my attention precisely because they revealed how problematic universalist narratives have become.

The first happened during my interview with P9. She spoke about the problem of cultural context and how a lack of relevant knowledge could affect the assessment of an artwork. This led me to ask whether there were works she believed transcended their specific culture; those pieces that are colloquially referred to as “great” works of art. P9’s immediate reaction was to be visibly uneasy; shifting in her chair and lowering her gaze, she acknowledged that she considered the work of British-Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor to fall under that category, but explained that such notions were “uncomfortable” (P9,20,67).

A similar situation also came up with P1 as she discussed what the qualities of a successful painting were.

I think that great, exceptional paintings . . . touch people in a deeper way; a spiritual way. I'm going to put that in quotations: a “spiritual” way. Because that's not the word to use. But it has to touch the soul [pause]. It has to [pause]. Yeah, yeah [pause]. I won't say any more on that. (P1,18,90-91)

P2 was not the only participant to express a very specific viewpoint concerning what was most important in terms of art and art instruction. During the course of his interview, P4 plainly articulated his belief in postmodern notions of the essential role of socio/cultural context in all forms of human understanding and behaviour, and that of the artist as social critic and agent of social transformation.

Along with his statement that students seemed unaware that the purpose of the university was “to create critical, engaged citizens that can help generate debates about what it

is to be here and now” (P4,11,44), P4 also explained that he hoped that students came to his particular educational institution because it had “a background in social justice” and “a very radical past in terms of advocating social change” (P4,40,48-49).

This comment would have been less striking had the topic of social relevance not re-emerged several times during our conversations regarding both artwork and assessment. The exchange between myself and P4 is worth quoting at length, as it reveals how his beliefs permeated other aspects of his thinking, including in regards to art history.

P4: Professionally, a successful sculpture would not necessarily be a piece that I particularly like, but one that successfully articulates or conveys the artist’s concepts or ideas to the viewer. Whatever those ideas or concepts are.

Now there’s a whole other question of whether successful means what they’re conveying is actually important or relevant. That becomes a question of whether it’s successful critically. I don’t think making pretty objects is successful art, but it can be successful sculpture.

That’s one thing that I stress to students. You can make something that’s beautiful, but if it’s a self-referential, self-contained thing, than it’s just a sculpture but not a work of art. To be a work of art today, I think it has to have a critically engaged social connection to generate conversation. To generate questions as opposed to just looking pretty.

SF: So if a student were to say “But what about Dutch painting from the 17th century? Isn’t that art”?

P4: I’d say that that’s not art. . . . One of the biggest thing that I teach in my art theory class is that the word “art” only came into existence 200 years ago. So you can’t look back on Michelangelo and call David a work of art because Michelangelo is not the “artist” as we define it today. The 17th century Dutch artists . . . it’s not the same thing. There wasn’t even a museum back then. Most students need to realize that art is a relatively new invention, and there’s a lineage of [pause], you can go back to Michelangelo’s David; that wasn’t meant to be put in a gallery or a museum. It was

meant to have a specific social function; it was almost a site specific sculpture in a lot of ways. And the power of that work has been robbed because it's been removed and put in these institutions. But people also don't necessarily comprehend the social circumstances or the social role of that sculpture fulfilled.

So when students or professional artists make work to be put into the [museum], it seems like putting the cart before the horse because it's making art for the mausoleum. It's where art goes to die; their work should have something beyond being just a pretty artefact in the museum. (P4,18,82-84)

On the subject of student assessment, he initially joined the rest of the participants in stating that skill acquisition and proof of cumulative learning were essential criteria. However, another quite different criterion surfaced at the very end of his answer.

Did they really push themselves? Did they acquire new skills? Even if the sculpture turned out horribly, is that just simply because they were learning and they're acquiring. Did they push themselves, spend the required amount of time on the project? Does the object have some sort of thought beyond making something pretty and delicate? (P4,20,88)

One wonders why making something "pretty and delicate" should necessarily be problematic, especially in a course which, according to its own outline, is meant to be devoted to the technical skills necessary to making sculptures.

As was the case with P2, P4's ideological leanings were not only expressed in his interview, but also emerged during the class critique. During my observation, I witnessed as one student presented a piece which she explained depicted a tiger.

When asked, "Why a tiger?", her answer was simply "I like tigers. I wanted to make a sculpture of a tiger." "Is that it?" P4 then asked, before adding

Maybe you should investigate why artists use animals [in their work]. If an artist expects viewers to put in time and effort looking and thinking about the work, the viewers expect that the artist has also put in effort and thought into what they've made.

There are assumptions underlying this statement which are problematic. Firstly, his comments seemed to indicate that whatever effort the student had put into their work, it was not worth recognizing simply because their only intention had been a mimetic one. Along with this is the assumption that work which is interested in aesthetic criteria does not require thought, or at least not much of it. From a pedagogical point of view, the end result is that P4 is indicating to his students that only a certain type of artwork – that which has at its core an intention that isn't "only" aesthetic – is worth valuing, or, at the very least, is work that he will consider worth valuing.

Nor was this student alone; several of her peers also produced work which failed to engage with more than aesthetic and technical matters, and they were treated in similar fashion. From the comments made by P4 as well as some of the other students, there had obviously been an expectation on the part of some of those present that the work have something more; something other than wanting to make an object which could be called a sculpture. However, there was no discussion as to why this should be the case. Inspection of the course outline revealed little indication of such theoretical criteria. The description of the course focussed on issues of technical skills, construction processes and craftsmanship. The word "concept" appeared only twice within the six page, single spaced document, along with the phrase "To cultivate critical thinking" as a course objective (see also 9.3 below). As for P2, when I asked him about his course outline, he described it as "standard stuff" that was "cut and paste" from the official course calendar (P2,25,120-122).

Comparing the respective beliefs expressed by P2 and P4, it is interesting to note that both were adamant about the essential role that technical skills played in the elaboration of successful artwork. However, P4's beliefs seemed underpinned by postmodern notions of Social Justice and socio/cultural reflexivity, while P2 held Modernist ideas of universalism and artistic essentialism.

The history of art is rife with ideological beliefs and struggles between one system of thought and another. P6 specifically referred to this when he spoke of how antagonism between competing artistic beliefs could lead to particularly interesting debates in the classroom, if students were only aware of them (section 4.4.3). However, as the above examples demonstrate, having such deeply-held beliefs can also affect an instructor's pedagogical approaches and assessments in ways that they, and their students, may not be aware of.

Witness the two annoyed students from P2's class, described in Chapter 6, who felt they were not being given the freedom to express themselves. Had they been made aware ahead of time that the course they had enrolled in focussed almost completely on technical skills, taught by an instructor who believed observational skills were the foundation on which all subjective elements must be built, perhaps they would have reconsidered their decision.

And what about P4, who essentially believed that work without conscious social relevance was not art, and hence of lesser value? If the student who presented her tiger sculpture was expecting a course that would teach her the technical skills necessary to make objects she found aesthetically pleasing, the critique she received was probably more than she'd bargained for. Perhaps if she'd known that the instructor didn't believe that someone interested solely in the aesthetic dimensions of an object was making anything worthwhile, she would have picked a different instructor.

In both cases, there was a gulf between the students' expectations and the instructors' objectives. It is precisely such ideological systems that P13 referred to when he spoke of the importance of having some kind of common understanding in order to have effective conversations during critiques.

[There] has to be some sort of shared language system and belief system about what artworks do or can do and the words that we use to talk about it. "Belief" sounds [pause], that might be too strong of a term though, because then it slips pretty quickly into indoctrination. And I don't mean that; it's like in any given conversation where there's differences but you come to the table with [some] sort of agreed upon

standards. You might disagree but you agree to the terms that might be used.

(P13,20,79)

The issue here is not that one approach to art making or set of artistic beliefs is better than another, but rather that there is an inherent problem that emerges when such beliefs are not made clear to students. Without an awareness of the various ideological differences and aesthetic beliefs that can underpin their instructors teaching, students are placed in a profoundly unfair situation as they may be penalized for reasons they may not understand, could not expect, and cannot refute.

Capriciously, the two participants whose ideologies emerged most insistently within the data were also those who expressed the problem most clearly. P4 described the situation saying

What [students] end up having is a curriculum between areas – whether it's painting, sculpture, [or] time based [media] – that don't necessarily follow the same path or teaching philosophy. But you have students taking classes across different areas and I think that can become quite confusing and stressful. (P4,35,166)

As for P2, he referred to instructors being “polarized ideologically” and that this could lead to students being unfairly treated in terms of their assessment (P2,35,177). Amongst his parting words to his class at the end of his final critique session, he observed glibly

I always get the impression that we get half there and then we say good-bye. Then you're introduced to another person and it must get really confusing for you.

9.4 Learning through Doing: A Problematic Assumption

At the end of Chapter 5, I discussed how the subject of language emerged repeatedly during the course of the interviews, indicating its importance in a number of different areas. Whether as an essential factor in students being able to take part in critical discussions, having the capacity to properly articulate their ideas and intentions, or as a facet of

professionalization, various comments made by participants either directly or in passing, revealed the key role language plays in studio art education. Yet despite its obvious importance, there was little indication, either in their interviews, course outlines or the critique observations, that language was something focussed on pedagogically by participants, with the exception of P1 and P14.

Were it only a matter of students with lesser linguistic knowledge being at a disadvantage compared to their peers taking part in critiques, this would already be a serious issue. However, this becomes even more problematic if students are also being assessed on those very skills. But if students are being assessed on their language skills, then surely those skills should be specifically addressed within the curriculum being taught; something which was mostly not the case according to the data.

As mentioned in section 4.5.2, critical thinking was another subject that emerged repeatedly during these interviews as well, its importance emphasized in enabling students to develop intellectual skills that would allow them to perpetuate their artistic practice and to engage in lifelong learning. It was also claimed that critical thinking was an important part of the transferrable skills that were instrumentalized and taught by studio art instructors.

However, once again there was little indication that such skills were actually being taught, merely statements about their importance and the role they played within studio art education. Within the interview data, only P15 discussed at length the teaching of critical thinking as a course objective – a statement that was borne out by my observation data as well, and which is discussed at length in Chapter 8.

Finally, there was also little evidence to suggest that even the very notion of *how* to critique was something that was addressed other than in a cursory fashion. Participants mentioned that the best critiques were those where the student/artists themselves took control of the discussion; taking notes and preparing questions in advance in order to get feedback regarding specific aspects of their work. Yet in the observations, P15 was the only instructor to specifically approach the critique as a subject of his teaching rather than merely a venue for discussing student work. Kushins' (2007) doctoral research into studio foundations

programs similarly found that students were seemingly “expected to intuitively understand the purposes and processes of engaging in critiques” (p. 168).

The problem may in part be a semantic one, as the use of the term *critique* to denote the specific pedagogical model one associates with studio art instruction is troublesome at best. For one thing, it brings with it the often negative connotations associated with the word *criticism*, and this despite the latter’s derivation from the Greek *krinein*, which means an analysis, differentiation or evaluation (Wernik, 1985, p. 195). Next there is the fact that the word can be understood in several ways. Firstly, there is the verb *to critique*, meaning to examine critically or partake in a critical discussion of a subject; then there is the noun *a critique*, often used to describe an article, essay or other written commentary; finally, there is the further noun *the critique*, by which one means the pedagogical model.

Barrett (1988) and Soep (2000) explain that a conflation exists within general public perception between the act of *critique* with that of *art criticism*. This, they argue, does a disservice, as the principal goal of the former is to frame commentary to *improve* emerging work, whereas the latter seeks to create commentary that *illuminates* the public’s understanding of completed works (Soep, 2000, p. 64). My participant interviews pointed to a further confusion as they often seemed to conflate the three meanings of the word *critique* enumerated above. This may lead to the mistaken assumption that the critique as a pedagogical model merely involves taking part in the criticism of student work. Furthermore, as they take place in a pedagogical context, there is an expectation that students will be learning something from taking part in the critiques; why include them in the curriculum otherwise? This expectation leads in turn to the assumption that mere participation in a critique will somehow lead to learning - simply by osmosis, one must suppose.¹⁶

Overall, interviews indicated that many of the skills most-associated with the Critique, and indeed *instrumental* to the Critique – namely language, critical thinking and communication

¹⁶ Given the above, from this point forward I will use the capitalized nouns Critique or Crit to clearly differentiate the pedagogical model from the general verb or noun. Perhaps at some point in the future someone will come up with a different term altogether so that further misunderstanding can be avoided even in conversation, but as this dissertation takes a written format, this distinction will have to do for now.

skills – were acknowledged by participants as of key importance but with little evidence that they were actively being taught. Furthermore, these same skills were also often identified as essential to students' professionalization and future participation in their field.

Most instructors seemed to make the assumption that such skills could be learned in the same way as technical skills – that is, tacitly, and simply by through the act of engaging in them. P13 alluded to the usefulness of Critiques by stating that students learned through “participating in . . . conversations; either just being attentive to them, or verbally participating or getting into arguments” (P13,28,128-129). Similarly, when P10 described how participation in Critiques led students to adopt a stronger sense of criticality, she concluded “I’m convinced that they think that Critiques are a good thing ultimately. *They learn how to do it*” [emphasis mine] (P10, 27, 104).

P4 stated that taking part in Critiques teaches students how to participate and accept criticism (P4,28,138), an assumption that was stated, either implicitly or explicitly, by the majority of the instructors interviewed. But what evidence is there that this is actually the case? Taking part in Critiques certainly subjects students to criticism, but do they actually learn how best to gain from the experience? What concrete teaching about criticism, whether formulating it, analyzing it or internalizing it, takes place? And though critical thinking and linguistic proficiency may well be essential skills, what proof is there that they can be gained through participation in Critiques? The mistake is to believe that such skills can be learned in the same way as artistic skills – which is to say tacitly, and simply by doing.

Logic would dictate that since a successful Critique involves analysis and criticality as well as the effective communication of ideas, it can serve as an effective venue for students to observe these skills in action. But unless instructors actively utilize the Critique in order to teach these proficiencies, there is no reason to believe that students will actually have learned anything, and if they do, it may not necessarily be what the instructor had intended. Indeed, if students can learn implicit lessons from a successful Critique, they are perhaps just as likely to learn equally from unsuccessful ones.

For example, watching their peers create elaborate justifications to explain otherwise seemingly poor work (as discussed in section 5.5.5) may teach a student that it is much easier to try and pull the wool over the eyes of their instructor than to actually put the necessary effort required. Similarly, watching a peer confidently hold court over the class (section 5.5.4), using the “right” terminology and referencing this or that contemporary artist, may well simply teach a student that they themselves are inadequate; lacking in knowledge, experience, and oratory skills.

Chapter 10: Discussion

In this penultimate chapter, I discuss three specific issues of importance that emerged from this research, and make a several recommendations which stem from the findings. The first has to do with the need for a greater emphasis on language within the studio art curriculum given its key role not only within the Critique but also as a factor in the professionalization of art students. Secondly, I discuss how greater integration of individual instructor teaching and learning objectives along with communication between faculty members would help bring a stronger structure to studio art curricula.

Finally I return once again to the topic of the Critique. I begin by revisiting the claims made by participants regarding its objectives and to what extent these correspond to the reality as expressed by the data. I then review the widespread notion that the Crit is, or should be, principally a forum for assessment, and then examine its role as a space for instruction. The comparison of these two facets of the Critique leads to a discussion concerning how a new approach to this signature pedagogy, one based on notions associated with metacognitive learning, might be used to circumvent many of the Critiques weaknesses whilst magnifying and taking advantage of its inherent strengths.

10.1 Integrating Language in the Curriculum

In section 5.6, I discussed how data from interviews as well as observations indicated that language plays an essential part in both the Critique in particular, and the professionalization of artists in general. This finding supports those of Soep's (2000) dissertation, in which the author found that the complexity of the Critique was in large part due precisely to its essentially oral nature.

Various elements such as field-specific vocabulary, terms relating to particular aesthetic ideologies and historical and contemporary knowledge, combine to form what P14 aptly referred to as a “secret handshake” (P14,7,26) which can help make or break a student’s education and future success. These findings echo those of Dannels’ (2005) research in design education which revealed that the knowledge of field specific vocabulary was a key indicator for student success.

Reid (2007), citing McManus’s (2005) research on the role of language in admissions interviews to higher education art and design programs, further explains that under-valuing the role of discipline-specific language can do a profound disservice to student learning. A student’s capacity to “speak the language” of instructors will give a student the upper hand over their peers who lack a similar knowledge of the implicitly expected vocabulary.

Students who are unable to articulate confidently and conventionally about their work can come to feel inferior, to doubt their abilities, to wonder whether they really belong in an art school, and are thus prone to non-completion or failure. (p. 2)

This being the case, greater emphasis needs to be placed within the studio art curriculum on language and vocabulary. Given its oral nature, doing so within the context of the Critique, especially in the first years of the undergraduate experience, would seem to be the most logical choice. P1’s use of guiding questions (5.3.4) is an approach which could be used along with explicit discussion about field-specific vocabulary.

Outside of the Critique context, another helpful way to approach this issue would be to also include relevant field-specific readings into the curriculum. It is not enough, however, for instructors to simply assume that students have actually completed such readings. Indeed, although several research participants mentioned assigning readings to their students, I saw no indication that there was any attempt at verifying students’ comprehension of the assigned texts, let alone whether they had actually read them or not. In Kushins’ (2007) case study of the Foundation programs at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the College of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon University, the author makes similar recommendations based on similar

observations, stating that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on both the use of language in Critiques (p. 169) as well as the pedagogical use of readings (p. 166).

10.2 Strengthening Curricular Structure

It is undoubtedly true that instructors in all fields have different ways of approaching their teaching practices depending on their own experiences, beliefs and inclinations. Just as there are many different ways of learning, there are similarly a great variety of teaching methods one can espouse. Studio art instruction, however, is made more complicated by the inherent ambiguity of the field of art itself, and the strong role that ideologies have historically held within it. As Lavender (2003) discusses at length, such ideologies, coupled with teacher's own art training, can lead to serious problems if left unexamined.

Although some might see no inherent problem with this, claiming that there are many ways to be an artist, many ways to educate artists, and that this is just as it should be (Bogh, 2009), the fact is that, as Corner (2005) explains, "how [instructors] define the subject, the particular view they may have of its purpose, value and role, in itself determines how the curriculum is structured and the teaching and learning methods and strategies used to deliver it" (p. 335).

In her review of the literature, Salazar (2013b) observed that there was a strong confusion regarding the overarching goals of studio instruction, stating "some professors teach technical skills, others teach professional skills . . . , and still others aim at developing students' creativity or critical consciousness" (p. 69). The present research data certainly supports that assertion; when one is faced with a field where there is often a lack of a coherent pedagogical framework along with minimal instructor communication and multiple, sometimes competing as well as unspoken, artistic ideologies, it is little surprise if a great deal of confusion abounds. These findings echo those of Kushin's (2007), which similarly indicate the need for a greater focus on curricular structure and pedagogy in order to strengthen the effectiveness of studio art programs.

Several participants specifically expressed the need for greater structure within undergraduate studio art curricula as a whole. Lack of curricular planning was blamed for programs that did not reinforce and build upon knowledge from one year to the next, or even one class to the next. One example that was given described how instructors teaching different sections of a same course sometimes had no common syllabus. This could lead to a chaotic situation where students ostensibly completing the same class had been taught widely varying subject matter.

A seemingly simple way of reaching this goal would be the elaboration of forums in which instructors are encouraged to communicate and work collaboratively; such opportunities, when they arose, were described by participants as extremely productive and helpful, especially in regards to assessment. Departments should be constantly encouraging their faculty to take part in round tables and discussions regarding pedagogical matters. An obvious benefit to this would be that it would allow them to be more aware of each other's approaches to teaching, resulting in a sharing of best practices; learning objectives could be compared and discussed, leading to objectives that are made more explicit and less assumed.

A specific result of such sharing of information would be to help in the discussion surrounding the pedagogical uses of the Critique. One of the particularly interesting parts of conducting this research was to discover just how many different approaches and strategies to running Critiques emerged from the fifteen interviews I conducted. These were in addition to others I came across in Critique literature (see section 2.5). Yet despite this wide variety of Crits, many participants stated that they generally always used either the conventional or cold-read methods.

Not only would greater communication allow faculty to share such things as Critique methods, but it would also give them the opportunity to discuss ideological differences. Resulting conversations could allow for interesting opportunities for debate and cooperation that would add a great deal of pedagogical breadth as well as depth to students' learning. Obviously, there is a risk that such openness might lead to conflict between individuals holding seemingly incompatible opinions; indeed, one could speculate that precisely such conflicts may

be a reason behind the lack of communication in question. Yet, however much this may be the case, such concerns cannot be given greater importance than student learning.

If students are expected to be able to situate their art production and beliefs, they need to be made aware of the existence of the wide range of artistic ideologies that affect how an individual, be it student or instructor, makes and speaks about their work. This is an inherent part of their understanding of contemporary and historical discourses. Not only would this help them in constructing their understanding of themselves as artists in a coherent and logical fashion, it would also allow them to be aware of what particular viewpoints underpin their instructors' teaching as well.

10.3 Questioning the Critique

As previously mentioned in Chapter 9, many of the objectives attributed to the Critique were prone to important difficulties. In situ observations supported statements made by participants that Critiques served as important venues for feedback as well as community building. However, claims related to the objectives of professionalization and assessment were not so readily demonstrated. Other than discussions concerning the presentation of work, skills related to professionalization including language/communication skills, Critique proficiency and critical thinking skills were often not observably taught.

As for claims that Critiques were important, if not to say essential, in terms of assessment, the data of this study not only gives reason to question whether this is in fact the case, but also to question the assumptions that underpin such a belief.

To begin, it is worth noting that to describe the Critique as a *method*, or *technique* of assessment is a misnomer. One can argue that assessment may take place during the Critique, but it would be more precise to identify the actual methods of assessment as including various forms of analysis, deconstruction and Socratic debate. In fact, the Critique is more aptly described as being a *venue* for assessment; a space in which instructors and students have the opportunity to assess work made by their peers.

Pragmatically, it is hard to imagine how the Critique could not have some bearing on the assessment an instructor makes regarding a specific student. After all, it allows them to observe such criteria as student behaviour, participation and communication skills, and it is undeniable that such observations will, whether consciously or not, whether purposely or not, have a tacit effect on how the instructor assesses that student when the time comes to formulate a grade. But to make the leap from the above observation to stating that the Critique must therefore be considered as a method of assessment is problematic, even if one puts aside the somewhat semantic argument presented above. In fact, the more closely one examines what actually occurs in Critiques, the more its role in assessment becomes problematic.

10.3.1 Who is assessing? Firstly there is the problem that the Critique is essentially a social activity in which meaning is co-created by all those present. Critiques involve a number of individuals who, along with discussing the formal aspects of a given piece of work, formulate theories regarding the work's possible meanings; ideas are exchanged and explored in a conversational back and forth which can lead those present to unexpected interpretations. Participants in this research described the sense of excitement, surprise and enthusiasm that often stemmed from the emergence of such "latent content", and several specifically stated that this had an effect on the grade they formulated.

No one who has ever experienced just such a moment of discovery and surprise can deny that the sense of excitement it often elicits is one of the high points of the Critique experience, nor can one disagree that such occurrences can be important moments of learning that yield a great deal of potential avenues of exploration for students and instructors alike. However, interpretations such as these may in fact have no bearing at all on what the student/artist had intended in making the work at hand. That being the case, how can one allow a grade to be influenced by something unintentional? Given the unpredictability of such moments of discovery, that they can occur *despite* rather than *because of* a student/artist's intentions, and that they can happen completely by *accident*, it is to say the least problematic if

the instructor lets this event have a bearing on the grade he or she allocates to the student/artist.

Furthermore, if latent content emerges through a group discussion, how can one ascertain with any certainty who of all those present held the initial of realization from which that particular interpretation stemmed? If it was not the student/artist in question, then surely it should not affect their grade. That such discoveries may add to the perceived interest of the work and its intrinsic qualities is undeniable, and were the subject of assessment in Critiques simply the artwork itself this would not be a problem. However, one of principal objectives of Critiques according to the literature as well as a portion of the participants is that it is used to assess students.

10.3.2 What, or whom, is being assessed? This leads to the question of what the actual subject of assessment in a Critique is meant to be; the student or their work. Participants' answers to this question were mixed, and often confused. Some answered one, some the other, and a few answered both, or even changed their minds mid-answer. The reason for this is not difficult to ascertain, as all participants agreed that the relationship between the student and their work was difficult, if not impossible to untangle.

Given that the Critique takes place in front of the work which is also the focus of discussion (indeed, imagine a Critique taking place without the artwork being present), it is no surprise if it is assumed that the Critique is about assessing the work. Yet again, however, data indicated that it was the student that was the subject of assessment.

10.3.3 Assessed for what? Finally, if indeed it is the student who is being assessed in the Critique, then it is important to re-examine what instructors claim to be assessing them for. Here it is worth returning to the general assessment criteria communicated by participants. Though not all were associated by every participant directly with the Critique, their relevance lies in the fact of their claimed importance in terms of assessment. These criteria fell into five

main categories: Student Engagement (Attendance, Participation), Student Investment (Effort, Commitment), Student Progress, Artwork (Technical skills, Intentionality), and Professionalism (Presentation, Language/Communication, Critique Proficiency and Critical Thinking Skills).

The first three of these criteria categories are not necessarily dependant on Critiques taking place. Practical criteria related to student engagement and investment such as Attendance, Participation, Effort and Commitment, can be observed by the instructor and assessed during regular course instruction.¹⁷ The same can also be said of Student Progress, where a student's development is measured over the timespan of the entire course.

The first criteria associated with artwork – Acquisition of Technical Skills – is for the most part taught outside of the Critique, and can be gaged from the instructor's observations of the student as they work in the studio and the progress of their specific works up to the point of its completion.

This leaves the criterion of Intentionality, along with those associated with professionalism, namely Presentation, Language/Communication, Critique Proficiency and Critical Thinking Skills). These particular criteria were specifically mentioned as skills learned by students during the Critique.

However, as discussed above, data indicated that the notion that one can assess intentionality, at least in the context of the group Critique, is highly problematic.

As for the criteria linked to professionalism, three of these – Critical Thinking Skills, Language/Communication and Critique Proficiency – were not seen to be actively taught. It stands to reason, then, that these criteria should not be included in student assessment.

¹⁷ It is worth pointing out, however, that such criteria are not learning objectives per se., as they cannot be taught, only encouraged.

10.4 Critique 2.0: The MetaCritique

10.4.1 Rethinking the Critique. When one thinks of art criticism, the general assumption is that the object of assessment is the work, whatever the medium might happen to be. Though certain facts regarding the artist, such as their background and stated personal beliefs, may colour the resulting discussion, the focus remains, for the most part, on the work in question.

Participants in this study acknowledged that a close relationship existed between a student and the work they produced, and that the two could not readily be separated. For example, student attitude and behaviour was often seen as affecting the quality of their work. This did not mean, however, that there was necessarily a direct correlation between the quality of the student and the quality of their work; poor artwork was not necessarily indicative of a poor student, nor was strong work by definition the sign of a good student.

Discussions about intentionality also revealed that the work can behave independently from the student. Through Critique discussions, new interpretations can arise which have nothing to do with the student themselves; rather, they are the product of the viewers, either individually or communally. Such latent content, however insightful and relevant it might be, is essentially intrinsic to the work, but extrinsic to the student.

The above observations point to the fact that merely examining a student's artwork is not enough to reach a reliable assessment of their success within a pedagogical setting. The work can be read as an indicator of student learning and examined for signs of student progress (though only through comparison with previous work) both technically and conceptually, but in order to assess fairly, one should attribute to the student qualities which are intrinsic to the work. Put another way; a student should not be assessed solely upon the virtues of the work they produce as there are simply too many aspects of the work that cannot be attributed with any certainty to the student involved.

The experience of Critique will invariably feed into assessment, but as indicated in this study, the focus of assessment leads to a number of erroneous assumptions regarding the value of the Critique and what is currently being taught with it.

An instructor assesses their students continuously whilst in conversation, observation and instruction, and the Critique is yet another venue in which this is bound to take place. Yet even then one could argue that, in terms of examining a student's work for elements that can be factored into that assessment, a Crit is probably the least conducive place for doing so effectively, given its essentially social nature. After all, it is the instructor's role to assess the student, not the student's peers', and the instructor's thinking should neither be hijacked by unstructured, tangential discussions – however interesting they may be – nor take place in as busy and chaotic an atmosphere as a Critique.

Yet despite the above, the Critique is nonetheless considered primarily a form of assessment, as was indicated by the participants in this research, and the focus of the Critique is placed on the work. As for learning objectives, they are often vague, and with little indication of being taught. This may partially be because, by focussing on the work rather than the student, it is easy to miss learning opportunities; if the subject of the Critique is the work, than why think about pedagogy? After all, a sculpture doesn't learn.

The question that remains, then, is how can we best utilize the Critique? If, as I have demonstrated, it is at best a poor venue for conducting assessment, then what is it good for?

10.4.2 The Metacritique; a learning event. In Chapter 8, I described how James (P15) conducted a Critique in which part of the exercise seemed to be an analysis of the Critique itself. Conversations regarding formal elements and matters of interpretation were regularly punctuated with moments he would halt the proceedings and have them notice and reflect upon something that had just occurred. Whether it was a particular bit of interaction between two of the participants, or a specific interpretation whose underpinnings were unclear, James would turn the class's attention upon itself. In those moments, James was essentially making

the Critique's implicit functions explicit, and teaching the Crit whilst performing it. The class was being given the opportunity to explore the Crit along with their own behaviour *metacognitively*.

Reflecting on these observations and they're relationship with the rest of my research data eventually led me to theorize about how the experience and learning outcomes of the Critique would change if one were to approach it in a metacognitive fashion

10.4.2.1 Metacognition. The prefix 'meta' is used to define something as "occurring later than or in succession to" and "a more highly organized or specialized form of" its suffix. In disciplinary terms, it is used to "designate a new but related discipline designed to deal critically with the original one" ("meta", 2015).

Perhaps the best known such field of study is that of *metacognition*, a term introduced by John Flavell in the early 1970s stemming from his concept of *metamemory*, which focussed on how we understand the way our memory functions and the ways such knowledge can influence further memory performance (Flavell, 1971). Over subsequent decades, the notion of metacognition was expanded to apply to a variety of other domains such as reasoning, problem solving and language learning (Kuhn, 2000).

Flavell (1979) defines metacognition as "knowing and cognition about cognitive phenomena", or to put it more prosaically as the act of 'thinking about ones' own thinking'. By doing so, we become more aware and reflective regarding our thinking, and are more able to monitor how we are influenced by external sources.

According to Kuhn (2000), metacognition first appears early in children as they first begin to acquire an awareness of themselves and of others as beings who learn and know. As children develop into adulthood, metacognition "follows an extended developmental course during which it becomes more explicit, more powerful, and hence more effective, as it comes to operate increasingly under the individual's conscious control" (p. 178). This developmental process does not occur entirely on its own, however, and its later stages are not necessarily

observable in adults who have not had the opportunity to take part in experiences that teach metacognition (Kuhn & Dean Jr., 2004).

10.4.2.2 Metacognitive learning and the Critique. The notion that Critiques lend themselves to metacognitive learning is supported by several observations.

Firstly, Gorgiadhes (2004) and Martinez (2005) explain that metacognitive learning takes place most effectively in a supportive, social environment, where spoken reasoning can take place; a description that coincides with Dannel's (2005) description of the Critique as an oral genre that takes place in the social context of the classroom.

Secondly, critical thinking, which was identified by participants as a key learning outcome for their students, is also strongly linked to metacognition (Martinez, 2006). Though some may believe the two to be interchangeable (Snyder & Snyder, 2008; Tempelaar, D. T., 2006), Kuhn and Dean Jr. (2004) consider them to be distinct due to their field-specificity; metacognition belonging to the field of psychology whilst critical thinking is associated with that of education. By incorporating metacognition learning into the Critique, those learning objectives which the present research indicated were not being actively taught, i.e. critical thinking and Critique proficiency, can be made explicit.

Another important benefit of this approach is the role it can have in teacher training. In Chapter 9, P15 discussed how he credited the emphasis he placed on self-reflection within his pedagogy in part to his training as an art education undergraduate; specifically the observations of art teachers working in middle and high schools. These experiences were ones which he internalized and then applied to the studio art courses he took later on, knowing as he did that he was planning on teaching in the future.

This is consistent with recent findings by Blair and Fitch (2015), who's research into pre-service teacher identity formation revealed that undergraduate art education students in their department not only experienced their studio classes as instruction, but also actively analysed them from a pedagogical point of view. Focus group data indicated that these students "watched and analysed how their instructors taught; they questioned assessment criteria and

pedagogical approaches [and] seemed unaware that this behaviour differentiated them from their studio cohorts” (p. 97). Furthermore, this was not part of the stated curriculum, but was rather an analysis which the students conducted on their own in an unstructured fashion.

One of the issues to emerge from the present study is that a number problems arise from a lack of formal educational training on the part of post-secondary studio instructors. By participating in the Metacritique, undergraduates in studio art would take part in a similar experience as their art education peers; sauce for the goose, in this case, is most certainly good for the gander.

Essentially, what I am suggesting is that the emphasis placed on Critiques as a forum for assessment whose focus is student artwork neglects the key objective of studio instruction, and instruction in general, namely *student learning*. The entire process of the Critique should be transformed from a forum for assessment into an extended exercise in self-reflection whose focus is the student rather than their work. The examination of student work which occurs in the Critique should be seen as an opportunity for teaching and learning critical thinking through the act of informed debate.

Naturally, and unavoidably, assessment of the work will occur in the process, but only in its more general sense of establishing worth or significance, not in the pedagogical sense which results in a grade. The latter, in any case, is the task of the instructor, who as has been previously discussed should only be treating the work as an indicator of student learning. Furthermore, such assessment is better left to take place at a time separate from that of instruction.

Furthermore, this should be made explicit to students. Firstly because, in order to be effective, metacognitive learning must be made explicit (Martinez,2005; Kuhn,2000). Secondly, as long as students believe that the Critique is about their instructor’s assessment of their work, this is likely to be their foremost preoccupation. Indeed, Kuhn and Dean Jr. (2004) state that activities that are thought to serve as occasions for evaluation, are amongst the least likely to facilitate metacognitive learning, as it is the former rather than the latter which is most likely become the focus of students’ attention (p. 270).

Though this may be wishful thinking, it can also be hoped that discussions around critical thinking, the emphasis of process over product and the de-emphasizing of student work as focus of assessment may have an influence on students' pre-occupation with grades. It is to say the least problematic if, as the present research indicated, the importance attributed to grades by instructors on one hand and their students on the other is diametrically opposed.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

I begin this conclusion in the same way as I began my introduction, which is to say on a personal note. After all, as I described in Chapter 1, my personal and professional experiences as both student and instructor are what led me to this thesis in the first place. Even before I was persuaded to embark upon this project by my then Masters' thesis supervisor, Dr. Lorrie Blair, many of the issues explored within had been milling around the back of my mind for many years, so it is safe to say that this is a work in which I have been deeply engaged and which I feel particularly invested in.

All of the above brings me then to the following. At the end of the day; after more than four years of reading, research, writing, note taking and transcribing; after countless hours of conversations with students, instructors, artists, friends and family; after untold hours of internal musings and debates whilst sitting in the bath, riding public transit and generally staring into space; and after travelling from one side of the continent to another, hanging out in airports and waiting for connecting flights just to snatch an hour here or there of conversation, or a couple of hours of watching students talk... After all of this and more; what did I actually find?

As the preceding pages describe, what I found was a field populated by instructors who care deeply about the work they do, about art, and about their students. However, despite their best intentions and intense efforts, what I also found was that there was a palpable sense of anxiety and frustration concerning how their field was viewed by others, be they administrators, other academics or even their own peers. A lack of training, resources and pedagogical support was further seen to undermine these efforts, leading to a level of insularity within the profession that is detrimental both to instructors and students.

Assessment, often a source of anxiety for instructors in any educational field, was revealed as even more fraught by the unquantifiable and chaotic nature of artmaking. Though

assessment practices were in some cases explicit, in others they were prone to ambiguity. Certainly, there was a distinct lack of cohesiveness, and this even amongst instructors working in the same departments.

As for Critiques, despite their unique and practically uncontested role as key to studio instruction and assessment, data demonstrated that they were in many ways singularly problematic in terms of instruction. Their social nature as well as the closely entangled relationship between students and their work were shown to have potentially highly detrimental effects on their effectiveness. Many important learning objectives associated with the Critique were revealed to be at least in part based on the assumption that students were learning them as they would an artistic skill; which is to say, tacitly. Not only this, but there was also little indication of how students were in fact being assessed for these same learning objectives.

Importantly, given the focus of this research, Critiques were also shown to be ineffective as tools for assessment; in fact, the very notion that they served purposes of assessment seemed to lead to the neglect of opportunities for student learning.

Despite all of the above, however, one should not conclude that all is lost, or that the situation is so chaotic and confused that there is nothing to be done. If anything, the extent to which participants were willing and interested in discussing these issues indicates that there is a great deal to be hopeful about. Assessment is not only an academic necessity, but, more importantly inasmuch as studio instruction is concerned, it is *possible*. Instructors are assessing their students constantly and on a daily basis; what is missing is greater discussion and a willingness to acknowledge just how difficult a process assessment is within the field of studio instruction. Such an acknowledgement is not an admission of failure; merely a statement of fact, and one that should excite and spur us on to tackle this seemingly hydra-like – might I say even, *rhyzomic* – beast.

Similarly, there is much to be gained from the use of the Critique, despite its many and varied complexities; after all, it is difficult to believe that they would not have been abandoned long ago had they no redeeming features, or only limited interest. I would even argue that the

very fact that studio instructors insist on their importance and hold on to them as part of their curricula, while simultaneously often tearing their hair out in frustration, is reason enough to make them worth examining further. More would be achieved, however, if we chose to pay closer attention to Critiques, and gave them the attention that they deserve – a statement which is as good a way as any to state that further research is most sorely needed.

It is precisely thanks to the focussed attention that comes from careful research that I was able to reach the findings that are elaborated upon within the preceding pages, and am able to establish my own concrete contribution to the field, namely the MetaCritique. In itself, this contribution is the product not only of the data that was collected and the analysis that stemmed from it, but also of my personal belief not only that art *can* be taught, but that it *should* be taught. The latter belief was clearly shared by all the participants who so graciously gave up of their time to share their thoughts, experiences and classrooms with me, though, as is hinted at throughout the interviews, the reasons they would give for this belief if asked directly would undoubtedly vary. For much like art itself, there are many reasons why we choose to teach; a wide variety of goals and underlying philosophies. However, whatever these reasons may be, they are all underpinned by the shared belief that the teaching of art is inherently worth doing, and this to the best of our abilities. As such is the case, it is my fervent hope that the accumulated work which the reader now holds in their hands will serve in achieving precisely that goal.

Appendix A: Introductory Letter to Prospective Participants

Dear,

My name is Sebastien Fitch, and I am a PhD student in the department of Art Education at Concordia. I have a background in studio art focusing on painting, and have studied as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto as well as at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

As a practicing artist and educator, one area that has been of great interest to me ever since my undergraduate years at UofT is the question of the assessment of artwork in an educational setting. Although there is a great deal of writing on the subject as it applies to primary and secondary-school students, there is comparatively little that examines what goes on in the college or university classroom.

With my supervisor, Prof. Lorrie Blair, I am currently working on a thesis research project in which I examine the practical assessment methods of studio art instructors. I was therefore hoping that you might be interested in being part of my research.

My methodology would focus on one studio course which you teach. I will begin by examining the relevant course outline, then conduct an initial interview with you regarding your personal philosophy of art-making and art education pedagogy. I would then like to observe as many critiques for that course as time and opportunity would allow and finish with a follow-up interview with you in order to share and clarify my observations. All information will be kept strictly confidential.

Furthermore, I will not interview students as the goal of my research is to learn about methods of assessing student artwork, not what the students happen to think of the course or its evaluation procedures.

Through this research, I hope to gain practical knowledge that I can use towards my future teaching experience. The results may also be presented and published in such a form as to provide valuable guidelines for novice teachers in their assessment practices in Higher Education courses in Studio Arts.

My current plan is to begin preliminary interviews in the Fall of 2013.

Please let me know as soon as is convenient if you would be interested in participating, and email me with any questions you might have

Best regards,

Sebastien Fitch

Appendix B: Consent Form for Thesis Research Participation (Instructors)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN

Critiques, Credits and Credibility: Assessment Practices in Higher Education Studio Arts Courses

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Sebastien Fitch of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University (tel: 514 766 3639 email: lrdlm@yahoo.ca) for his doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. Lorrie Blair of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University (tel: 514 848-2424 ext 4642 email: lblair@alcor.concordia.ca).

A. Purpose

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to ascertain methods of art assessment within the context of post-secondary fine art studio courses.

B. Procedures

- I understand that course outlines will be requested from each participant pertaining to specific studio courses that will be observed as part of this research.
- I understand that there will be an initial interview of each instructor lasting between 1 and 1.5 hours. Interviews will be recorded and the interviewer will be taking notes.
- I understand that the interviewer will observe critiques (the number will depend upon time and opportunity) and take notes.
- I understand that a final interview with each instructor will take place, which will last approximately 1 hour. Interviews will be recorded and the interviewer will be taking notes.

C. Risks and Benefits

- I understand that I will have the opportunity to reflect on my own practice in collaboration with a colleague and have access to the results of the research to which I have contributed.

D. Conditions of Participation

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study will be CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity)
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

EMAIL _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's Principal Investigator, Sebastien Fitch of the Department of Art Education at telephone 514-766-3639 or via email at lrldlm@yahoo.ca

or

Dr. Lorrie Blair of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University at telephone 514-848-2424 ext 4642 or via email at lblair@alcor.concordia.ca .

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 ethics@alcor.concordia.ca .

Thank you very much for your participation!

Appendix C: Consent Form for Thesis Research Participation (Students)

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN**Critiques, Credits and Credibility: Assessment Practices in Higher Education Studio Arts Courses**

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project being conducted by Sebastien Fitch of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University (tel: 514 766 3639 email: lrdlm@yahoo.ca) for his doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. Lorrie Blair of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University (tel: 514 848-2424 ext 4642 email: lblair@alcor.concordia.ca).

A. Purpose

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to ascertain methods of art assessment within the context of post-secondary fine art studio courses.

B. Procedures

- I understand that the researcher will be observing class critiques and taking notes.

C. Risks and Benefits

- N/A

D. Conditions of Participation

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

- I understand that my participation in this study will be CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity).
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY
CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

EMAIL _____

If at any time you have questions about the proposed research, please contact the study's
Principal Investigator, Sebastien Fitch of the Department of Art Education at telephone 514-
766-3639 or via email at lrldlm@yahoo.ca

or

Dr. Lorrie Blair of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University at telephone 514
848-2424 ext 4642 or via email at lblair@alcor.concordia.ca .

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the
Research Ethics and Compliance Advisor, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481
ethics@alcor.concordia.ca .

Thank you very much for your participation!

Appendix D: Participant Interview Questions

I- GENERAL ARTS BACKGROUND AND BELIEFS

- 1- What is your artistic education?
- 2- How would you describe your artistic practice?

II- PROFESSIONAL TEACHING INFORMATION

- 3- What is your educational background?
- 4- How long have you been teaching art?
- 5- What courses have you taught in the past?
- 6- How long have you been teaching at your current institution?
- 7- What courses do you currently teach?

III- TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

- 8- How do you generally structure your courses?
- 9- What do you think students should learn in [media of particular course] courses?
- 10- What are the most pressing issues and concerns you have encountered in teaching [media of particular course]?
- 11- Are there aspects of your art practice (materials, methods, themes) that are mirrored in/that affect your teaching?
- 12- If you were to use two words to describe your teaching philosophy, what would they be?

IV- ASSESSMENT (GENERAL)

- 13- In your artistic training, what do you remember about the way your instructors went about assessing students and their work?
- 14- Did your educational training prepare you to deal with the question of assessing students and their work? -
- 15- Do you receive feedback about your assessment practices from other staff or administration?

16- What is the relationship between the assessment of a student and the assessment of their work?

V- ASSESSING [media of particular course]

17- What is [media of particular course]?

18- How do you view the relationship between the formal and the conceptual in [media of particular course]?

19- How does one assess the creative worth of a [media of particular course]?

20- What are the qualities of a successful [media of particular course]?

21- What are the qualities of an unsuccessful [media of particular course]?

22- What are the difficult aspects of assessing a [media of particular course]?

23- Do you assess a [media of particular course] in a gallery or museum differently than the [media of particular course] of a student?

VI- STUDENT ASSESSMENT

24- What methods do you use when assessing students?
(portfolio, group critiques, private critiques, written feedback...)

25- What role does the critique play in your overall evaluation of a student and their work?

26- What criteria do you use when assessing students?
(the art product, knowledge of contemporary/historical context, technical skill, personal expression, aesthetics?)

27- How do you convey these criteria to students?

28- Do students ask questions/ voice concerns over assessment practices?

VII- CRITIQUES

29- Briefly, how do you define what a critique is?

30- What is the student's role in the critique?

31- What are the main objectives of a critique?

32- What is being assessed in a critique?

33- Describe what happens in a critique.

34- Please complete the following sentence: A bad critique is when...

35- Please complete the following sentence: A good critique is when...

36- What aspects of a critique do you find difficult?

37- What aspects of a critique do you enjoy?

38- Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix E: Summary Protocol Form (SPF) University Human Research Ethics Committee

Office of Research – Research Ethics and Compliance Unit: GM 1000 – 514.848.2424 ex. 7481

ethics@alcor.concordia.ca

Important (Faculty, staff, students)

Approval of a Summary Protocol Form (SPF) must be issued by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC) prior to beginning any research involving human participants.

The central UHREC reviews all faculty and staff research, as well as some student research (in cases where the research involves greater than minimal risk). The UHREC, Disciplinary College reviews all minimal risk student research (minimal risk course related research intended solely for pedagogical purposes is reviewed at the Department level).

Faculty and staff research funds/awards cannot be released until appropriate certification has been obtained. For information regarding the release of faculty and staff research funds/awards please contact the Office of Research. For information regarding the release of graduate student funds/awards please contact the School for Graduate Studies. For information regarding the release of undergraduate student funds/awards please contact the Financial Aid and Awards Office or the Faculty/Department.

Please submit one signed copy of this form to the UHREC c/o the Research Ethics and Compliance Unit via e-mail at ethics@alcor.concordia.ca. *Please allow at least one month for the central UHREC to complete the review; students should allow at least 14 days for the UHREC, Disciplinary College to complete the review.*

All research must comply with the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#), funding/award agency policies and guidelines, applicable law and governmental regulations, as well as the [Official Policies of Concordia University](#) as required.

Once obtained, the Certificate of Ethical Approval for Research Involving Human Participants is valid for one year and must be renewed on an annual basis throughout the life of the project. This requires the submission of an Annual Report Form before the current approval expires. A project's approval expires automatically if a renewal request is not received before the current approval expires. No research activities involving human participants may be conducted under an expired approval.

For more information regarding the UHREC, UHREC Disciplinary College or the procedures for the ethical review of research involving human participants, please see the *Concordia Policy for the Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants, VPRGS-3* and related *Procedures for the Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants* ([Official Policies of Concordia University](#)).

Important (students)

- If your project is encompassed within your supervising faculty member's SPF, your supervisor need only inform the Research Ethics and Compliance Unit via e-mail of your addition to the research team. If your project is an addition to, or an extension of, your supervising faculty member's SPF where a similar methodology is proposed, your supervising faculty member must submit a detailed modification request and any revised documents via e-mail; no new SPF is required.

Instructions

This document is a form-fillable Word document. Please open in Microsoft Word, and tab through the sections, clicking on checkboxes and typing your responses. The form will expand to fit your text. *Handwritten forms will not be accepted.* If you have technical difficulties with this document, you may type your responses and submit them on another sheet. Incomplete or omitted responses may cause delays in the processing of your protocol.

Status:

- ☐ Faculty/staff
- ☒ Graduate student (PhD, Masters)
- ☐ Undergraduate student
- ☐ Postdoctoral fellow

This research (check all that may apply):

- ☐ Is health and/or medical related
- ☐ Is to take place at the PERFORM Center
- ☐ Includes participants under the age of 18 years
- ☐ Includes participants with diminished mental or physical capacity
- ☐ Includes Aboriginal peoples
- ☐ Includes vulnerable individuals or groups (*vulnerability may be caused by limited capacity, or limited access to social goods, such as rights, opportunities and power and includes individuals or groups whose situation or circumstances make them vulnerable in the context of the research project, or those who live with relatively high levels of risk on a daily basis*)
- ☐ Involves controlled goods/technology, hazardous materials and/or explosives, biological/biohazardous materials, or other hazards (radioisotopes, lasers, x-ray equipment, magnetic fields)
- ☒ Is multi-jurisdictional/multi-institutional/multi-centric

1. Submission Information

Please check ONE of the boxes below:

- ☒ This application is for a new protocol.
- ☐ This application is a modification or an update of an existing protocol:
- Previous protocol number (s):

2. Contact Information

Please provide the requested contact information in the table below:

| | | | | |
|--|------------------|--|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Principal Investigator/ Instructor | Department | Internal Address | Phone Number | E-mail |
| SEBASTIEN FITCH (Phd student) | Art education | 1515 Ste. Catherine St. West, EV 2.619 | 514 766 3639 | lrdlm@yahoo.ca |
| Faculty Supervisor (required for student Principal Investigators) | | Department / Program | | E-mail |
| DR LORRIE BLAIR | | ART EDUCATION | | lblair@alcor.concordia.ca |
| Co-Investigators / Collaborators | | University / Department | | E-mail |
| | | | | |
| Research Assistants | | Department / Program | | E-mail |
| | | | | |

3. Project and Funding Sources

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Project Title: | Critiques, Credits and Credibility: Assessment Practices in Higher Education Studio Arts Courses. |
|----------------|---|

In the table below, please list all existing internal and external sources of research funding, and associated information, which will be used to support this project. Please include anticipated start and finish dates for the project(s). Note that for awarded grants, the grant number is REQUIRED. If a grant is an application only, list APPLIED instead.

| | | | |
|---------|---------------|-------|--------------|
| Funding | Project Title | Grant | Award Period |
|---------|---------------|-------|--------------|

| Source | | Number | Start | End |
|--------|---|--------|----------------|----------------|
| FQRSC | Critiques, Credits and Credibility: Assessment Practices in Higher Education Studio Arts Courses. | 150225 | Sept 1st, 2011 | Aug 31st, 2014 |
| | | | | |

4. Brief Description of Research or Activity

Please provide a brief overall description/lay summary of the project or research activity. The summary should not contain highly technical terms or jargon and should be in a style similar as to how you would describe your work to an individual without any discipline specific training. *Do not submit your thesis proposal or grant application.*

This project focuses on trying to understand how university instructors who teach studio courses at an undergraduate level go about assessing students and their work. Little research or writing has been done on the subject, despite the fact that assessment is a key part of a student's education.

I will be interviewing university studio instructors from several institutions, and observing class critiques in order to better understand their methods of assessment, the reasoning behind those methods, and their views concerning assessment in general.

5. Scholarly Review / Merit

Has this research been funded by a peer-reviewed granting agency (e.g. CIHR, FQRSC, Hexagram)?



Yes

Agency: FQRSC



No

If your research is beyond minimal risk (*defined as research in*

which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research)
 please complete and attach the Scholarly Review Form (Scholarly Review Forms for student research may be signed by thesis committee members)

6. Research Participants

α) Please describe the group of people who will participate in this project.

Participants will be post-secondary studio arts instructors.

β) Please describe in detail how participants will be recruited to participate. Please attach to this protocol draft versions of any recruitment advertising, letters, etcetera which will be used.

Participants will be contacted via an email (APPENDIX A) explaining the subject being researched and a general overview of what this would entail. Participants who respond positively will be sent a further email with more detailed information regarding methodology and an informed consent form to sign and return before the interview takes place (APPENDIX B).

χ) Please describe in detail how participants will be treated throughout the course of the research project. Describe the research procedures, and provide information regarding the training of researchers and assistants. Include sample interview questions, draft questionnaires, etcetera, as appropriate.

Informed written consent will be obtained from the participants before data collection, and confidentiality will be guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms and the masking of any details that might reveal the educational institutions involved.

The first phase will involve preliminary guided participant interviews (APPENDIX C) to survey instructors about their methods of student assessment and experiences of critiques. Additional questions will help gain background information regarding their artistic careers, teacher training, educational philosophies and attitudes towards student assessment in general. During all interviews, participants will be tape recorded for transcription.

Interviews will be followed by observations of class studio critiques associated with courses taught by the participant/instructors, during which field notes will be taken. Before conducting the studio critique observations, relevant course outlines will be requested from the participants. These will be examined in order to ascertain intended learning outcomes.

A final source of data will be a final round of post-observation interviews in order to answer questions that may have come up during the critiques and to gain a deeper understanding of the instructors' own views regarding their assessment methods.

No research assistants will be used.

7. Informed Consent

- a) Please describe how you will obtain informed consent from your participants. A copy of your written consent form or your oral consent script must be attached to this protocol. If oral consent is proposed, please describe how consent will be logged/ recorded. *Please note: written consent forms and oral consent scripts must follow the format and include the same information as outlined on the sample consent form.*

Once the participants have agreed to take part in this research, a consent form (APPENDIX B) will be emailed for them to complete and return to me when I meet with them in person.

- b) In some cultural traditions, individualized consent as implied above may not be appropriate, or additional consent (e.g. group consent; consent from community leaders) may be required. If this is the case with your sample population, please describe the appropriate format of consent and how you will obtain it.

N/A

8. Deception and Freedom to Discontinue

- a) Please describe the nature of any deception, and provide a rationale regarding why it must be used in your protocol. Is deception absolutely necessary for your research design? Please note that deception includes, but is not limited to, the following: deliberate presentation of false information; suppression of material information; selection of information designed to mislead; selective disclosure of information. Please describe the proposed debriefing procedures post-participation.

N/A

- b) How will participants be informed that they are free to discontinue at any time? Will the nature of the project place any limitations on this freedom (e.g. dissemination and/or publication date)?

Information regarding freedom to discontinue will be included in the preliminary email as well as the consent form. Those who volunteer to participate in this project will be informed that the data collected for this research project may be published.

9. Risks and Benefits

- a) Please identify any foreseeable benefits to participants.

Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their own practice in collaboration with a colleague and have access to the results of the research to which they have contributed.

- b) Please identify any foreseeable risks or potential harms to participants. This includes low-level risk or any form of discomfort resulting from the research procedure. When appropriate, indicate arrangements that have been made to ascertain that subjects are in

“healthy” enough condition to undergo the intended research procedures. Include any “withdrawal” criteria.

Given that all information regarding participants will remain strictly confidential, including the location of the teaching institutions involved, I do not foresee any risks or potential harm as a result of this study. In the unlikely case that any problems arise the professors will be reminded that they have access to the services offered by their institution as well as their faculty association or union or both.

- c) Please indicate how the risks identified above will be minimized. Also, if a potential risk or harm should be realized, what action will be taken? Please attach any available list of referral resources, if applicable.

Same as above

- d) Is there a likelihood of unanticipated “heinous discovery” (e.g. disclosure of child abuse, revelation of crime) or “incidental finding” (e.g. previously undiagnosed medical or psychiatric condition) outside of the intended scope of the research that could have significant welfare implications for the participant or other parties, whether health-related, psychological or social? If so, how will such a discovery be handled?
Note that in exceptional and compelling circumstances, researchers may be subject to obligations to report information to authorities to protect the health, life or safety of a participant or a third party (TCPS2, Article 5.1) Note that if, in the course of the research, incidental findings are discovered, researchers have an obligation to inform the participant (TCPS2, Article 3.4).

Same as b and c above

10. Data Access and Storage

- a) Please describe what access research participants will have to study results, and any debriefing information that will be provided to participants post-participation.

Once data analysis has taken place, I will contact participants with a preliminary summary of the results. They will be informed that they have two weeks to send in their comments from the date of receiving the preliminary results document. I will also offer to forward to each of them a copy of the final thesis paper once it has been completed and inform them that they can have access to the integral text of the dissertation through Spectrum Concordia Universities Open Access registry searchable through Clues at Concordia Libraries.

- b) Please describe the path of your data from collection to storage to its eventual archiving or disposal. Include specific details on short and long-term storage (format and location), who will have access, and final destination (including archiving, or any other disposal or destruction methods).

Data will be collected in the form of taped interviews (later transcribed), field notes. and journal entries.

All data, whether in hard copy or electronic formats, will be kept in a secure location in my place of residence. No data will be left or stored at work, school or any other unsecured location. Finally, data will be archived in a secure location in my place of residence.

11. Confidentiality of Results

Please identify what access you, as a researcher, will have to your participant(s) identity(ies):

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Fully Anonymous | Researcher will not be able to identify who participated at all. Demographic information collected will be insufficient to identify individuals. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Anonymous results, but identify who participated | The participation of individuals will be tracked (e.g. to provide course credit, chance for prize, etc) but it would be impossible for collected data to be linked to individuals. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Pseudonym | Data collected will be linked to an individual who will only be identified by a fictitious name / code. The researcher will not know the “real” identity of the participant. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Confidential | Researcher will know “real” identity of participant, but this identity will not be disclosed. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Disclosed | Researcher will know and will reveal “real” identity of participants in results / published material. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Participant Choice | Participant will have the option of choosing which level of disclosure they wish for their “real” identity. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please describe) | |

a) If your sample group is a population in which the revelation of their identity could be particularly sensitive, please describe any special measures that you will take to respect the wishes of your participants regarding the disclosure of their identity.

N/A

b) In some research traditions (e.g. action research, research of a socio-political nature) there can be concerns about giving participant groups a “voice”. This is especially the case with groups that have been oppressed or whose views have been suppressed in their cultural location. If

these concerns are relevant for your participant group, please describe how you will address them in your project.

N/A

12. Additional Comments

- a) Bearing in mind the ethical guidelines of your academic and/or professional association, please comment on any other ethical concerns which may arise in the conduct of this protocol (e.g. responsibility to subjects beyond the purposes of this study).

Given that part of my data collection will be the observation of studio class critiques where students will be in attendance, I will communicate to them at the onset of the observation that the instructor has agreed to participate in this research and that I will be observing him/her and taking notes during the critique. I will explain my own educational background, the purpose of this project, and emphasize that the students themselves are not the focus of the research and that neither they nor their art will be identified/used.

- b) If you have feedback about this form, please provide it here.

N/A

13. Signature and Declaration

Following approval from the UHREC, a protocol number will be assigned. This number must be used when giving any follow-up information or when requesting modifications to this protocol.

The UHREC will request annual status reports for all protocols, one year after the last approval date.

I hereby declare that this Summary Protocol Form accurately describes the research project or scholarly activity that I plan to conduct. Should I wish to make minor modifications to this research, I will submit a detailed modification request or in the case of major modifications, I will submit an updated copy of this document via e-mail to the Research Ethics and Compliance Unit for review and approval.

ALL activity conducted in relation to this project will be in compliance with:

- [The Tri Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans](#)
- The policies and guidelines of the relevant funding agency
- The [Official Policies of Concordia University](#)

Principal Investigator Signature: _____

Date: _____

Faculty Supervisor Statement (required for student Principal Investigators):

I have read and approved this project. I affirm that it has received the appropriate academic approval, and that the student investigator is aware of the applicable policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of human participant research at Concordia University. I agree to provide all necessary supervision to the student. I allow release of my nominative information as required by these policies and procedures in relation to this project.

Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____

Date: _____

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